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AUGUST

Adventure

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AUGUST

ADVENTURE

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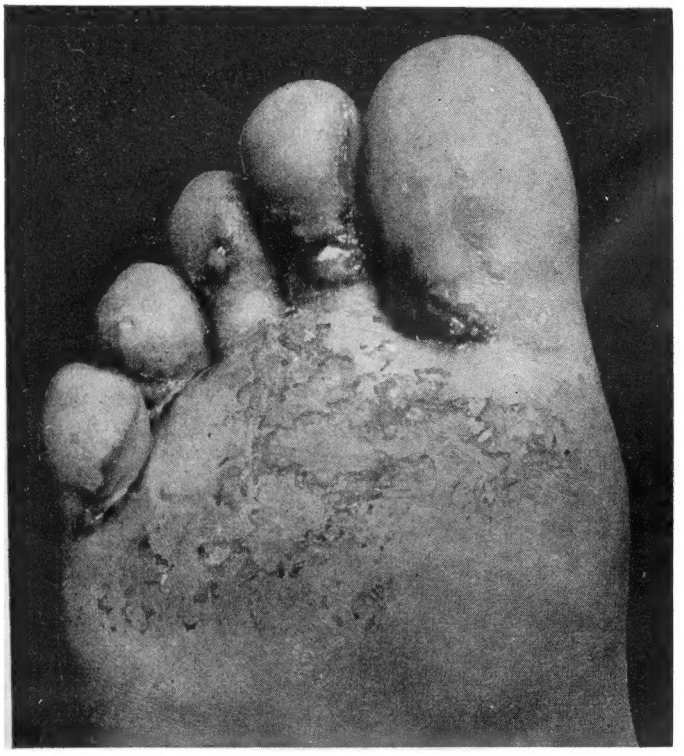
FOOT ITCH

ATHLETE'S FOOT



WHY TAKE CHANCES?

The germ that causes the disease is known as Tinea Trichophyton. It buries itself deep in the tissues of the skin and is very hard to kill. A test made shows it takes 15 minutes of boiling to destroy the germ, whereas, upon contact, laboratory tests show that H. F. will kill the germ Tinea Trichophyton within 15 seconds.

H. F. was developed solely for the purpose of relieving Athlete's foot. It is a liquid that penetrates and dries quickly. You just paint the affected parts. H. F. gently peels the skin, which enables it to get to parasites which exist under the outer cuticle.

ITCHING OFTEN RELIEVED QUICKLY

As soon as you apply H. F. you may find that the itching is relieved. You should paint the infected part with H. F. night and morning until your feet are better. Usually this takes from three to ten days.

H. F. should leave the skin soft and smooth. You may marvel at the quick way it brings you relief. It costs you nothing to try, so if you are troubled with Athlete's Foot why wait a day longer.

H. F. SENT ON FREE TRIAL

Sign and mail the coupon, and a bottle of H. F. will be mailed you immediately. Don't send any money and don't pay the postman any money; don't pay anything any time unless H. F. is helping you. If it does help you, we know you will be glad to send us $1 for the bottle at the end of ten days. That's how much faith we have in H. F. Read, sign and mail the coupon today.

PAY NOTHING TILL RELIEVED

Send Coupon

At least 50% of the adult population of the United States are being attacked by the disease known as Athlete's Foot.

Usually the disease starts between the toes. Little watery blisters form, and the skin cracks and peels. After a while, the itching becomes intense, and you feel as though you would like to scratch off all the skin.

BEWARE OF IT SPREADING

Often the disease travels all over the bottom of the feet. The soles of your feet become red and swollen. The skin also cracks and peels, and the itching becomes worse and worse.

Get relief from this disease as quickly as possible, because it is very contagious, and it may go to your hands or even to the under arm or crotch of the legs.

GORE PRODUCTS, Inc. POP.

815 Perdido St., New Orleans, La.

Please send me immediately a bottle of H. F. for foot trouble as described above. I agree to use it according to directions. If at the end of 10 days my feet are getting better, I will send you $1. If I am not entirely satisfied, I will return the unused portion of the bottle to you within 15 days from the time I receive it.

NAME.....

ADDRESS .....

CITY..... STATE.....

Be a Radio Technician

Learn at Home to Make $30, $40, $50 a WEEK

EXTRA PAY IN ARMY, NAVY, TOO
Men likely to go into military service, soldiers, sailors, marines should mail the Coupon Now! Learning Radio helps men get extra rank, extra prestige, more interesting duty at pay up to several times a private's base pay.

$200 a Month in Own Business
For the last two years I have been in business for myself making around $200 a month.—ARLIE J. FROEHNER, 300 W. Texas Ave., Goose Creek, Texas.

$10 a Week Extra in Spare Time
I am doing spare time Radio work, and I am averaging $500 a year—the difference between just barely getting by and living comfortably. — JOHN WASHKO, 97 New Cranberry, Hazleton, Penna.

If you want better pay quick, and a job in a field with a future, I offer you a time-tested, practical way to make $5, $10 a week extra in a few months, and to prepare for a good full time job paying up to $50 a week as a Radio Technician or Radio Operator.

I Have Trained Many Beginners For Opportunities Like These

Radio factories are receiving millions of dollars in Government Orders. The 882 Broadcasting Stations employ thousands of Radio Technicians and Operators. The Radio repair business is booming due to shortage of new home and auto Radio sets. Many Radio Technicians have their own spare or full time Radio businesses. Aviation, Commercial, Police Radio, Public Address Systems are other growing fields. Television will bring future opportunities.

Many Make $5, $10 a Week Extra In Spare Time While Learning

I give you special training to show you how to get and handle Radio jobs in your neighborhood while learning. My 50-50 method—half work with Radio parts, half Lessons—makes my Course interesting, fascinating, practical.

GET MY 64-PAGE BOOK FREE. It describes my Course; Radio's opportunities today and tomorrow; shows letters from more than 100 men I've trained. MAIL THE COUPON, in an envelope or pasted on a penny postal.

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 2HS9, National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Mail this Now Get 64-page Book FREE

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 2HS9
National Radio Institute
Washington, D. C.

Mail me FREE without obligation, your 64-page book "Rich Rewards in Radio." (No salesman will call. Write plainly.)

AGE.....

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY..... STATE.....

IMPORTANT To Men Who Have REGISTERED

If you are Registered, you've probably asked yourself these three questions:

1. "IF I AM DRAFTED FOR MILITARY SERVICE, how can I do the MOST for my country, and win advancement while I am in the Service?"
2. "IF I AM DRAFTED FOR CIVILIAN WAR WORK, how can I best help the country win the War?"
3. "IF I AM NOT DRAFTED, how can I make more money to meet increased costs of living, and get a better job that also helps my country?"

Here's one sensible answer—*to them all!* Start training at home, in your spare time, to be a Radio Operator or Technician. Here's why.

IF YOU ARE DRAFTED FOR MILITARY SERVICE

There is a real need in the Army and Navy communications service for trained Radio Operators and Technicians. If you have completed, or only partly completed a course in Radio training the chances are that you will be assigned to communications work. This will give you an opportunity to win extra rank and earn up to several times a private's pay. The National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C., has trained many men who now hold specialist's ratings in the Armed Forces. Many men in the Army now are studying with N. R. I. in order to serve their country better.

IF YOU ARE DRAFTED FOR CIVILIAN WAR WORK

The Government needs large numbers of Civilian Radio Operators and Technicians right now. Manufacturing, testing, installing, servicing Radio receivers and transmitters in airplanes, tanks, ships, demand more trained Radio men. Civilian Defense Radio services, Air Transport Services, Commercial Radio Stations and other vital Radio fields need trained men. If you are a Radio Technician or Operator, or are studying to be one, you'll have a chance to be assigned to one of these fields in any draft of civilian specialists.

IF YOU ARE NOT DRAFTED

The Radio repair business is booming. Stopping the manufacture of new Radios is creating jobs practically everywhere for spare time and full time Radio Technicians. Loud Speaker Systems offer good jobs. Many Radio Technicians have already gone into the Military Service, opening jobs for trained men to replace them. War days make Radio offer you many unusual opportunities now for a better job at better pay.

AFTER THE WAR--WHAT?

Civilian Radio continued expanding right up to the start of the War. Some fields are still expanding. I look for Television, Frequency Modulation ("F.M."), Electronic Instruments and Controls to offer good jobs through renewed expansion when the War is over. Making up the shortage of home and auto Radios should open thousands of jobs in manufacturing, selling, servicing, installing. To zoom ahead, tie your future to Radio's future.

WHAT TO DO NOW!

MAIL THE COUPON. Get my big 64-page book. Find out how you can train for Radio at home in spare time. See how many even begin to make $5, $10 a week extra fixing Radio sets in spare time while learning. Read letters from men I have trained (in the service and in civilian life) telling what they are doing and earning. Get the facts. MAIL THE COUPON, in an envelope, or pasted on a penny postal.

MR. J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 2HS9-A
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Send me your 64-page book which points out the advantages of learning Radio now and how you train men at home in spare time to become Radio Technicians and Radio Operators.

Age.....

Name .....

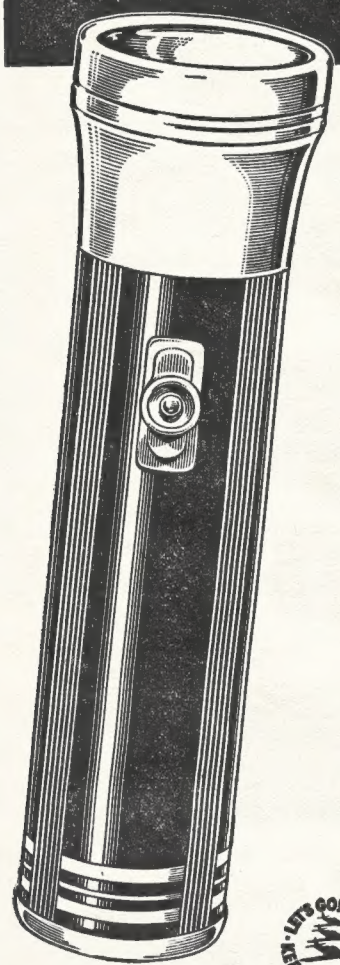
Address .....

City..... State.....

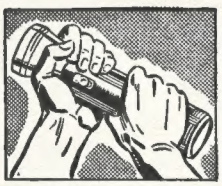
New! SPECIAL EVEREADY FLASHLIGHT

TRADE-MARK

FOR CIVILIAN WARTIME USE!

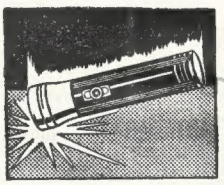


Made of special 5-ply fibre, new laboratory-tested design saves copper, brass, nickel, chromium and other metals vital to war use!



STRONG! . . . Made of special fibre sheets, tightly laminated in 5 layers, the tube is tough and hard. It will give long years of service!

WATER-REPELLENT! This new "Eveready" flashlight is protected by a special water-proof coating which seals out moisture.



LONG LASTING! . . . Drop it on concrete floor—this flashlight case can "take" ordinary abuse. It's actually more durable than millions of flashlights now in use.

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But metals or no metals, America needs flashlights . . . at home, in business, on the farm, in the factory . . . needs them for a thousand vital civilian uses.

And America shall have them!

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***Look for the* DATE-LINE**

SEPTEMBER ISSUE ON SALE AUGUST 7TH

Adventure

(Registered U. S. Patent Office)

Vol. 107, No. 4 for August, 1942 Best of New Stories

The Sword of Qualoon (1st part of 3) . . . . . BARRE LYNDON 11
Minor prophets are always stirring up trouble in Egypt but they never amount to anything. That was what Cunningham believed till the morning he found—traced in wet sand beside a native forge—the design for a sword that had brought death to the desert for centuries past.

Golden Showdown . . . . . SAMUEL W. TAYLOR 42
Introducing a pair of octogenarian gun-fighters in the smoke of battle.

You Gotta Be Hard . . . . . BILL GULICK 51
"Man-killer!" . . . "No more feeling in him than so much cement!" Those were the things Steve Bentley's hot-line crew said of their foreman. But when men work with nothing but their nerve between them and several thousand volts of sudden death, they can't afford to be soft.

The Howe of Herlaug . . . . . De WITT NEWBURY 60
The Old Gods and the New may be enemies, yet when a man does good work he's apt to find them both supporting his flanks in battle.

Night Wings . . . . . TOM ROAN 70
Only the law of tooth and fang prevails in the Alabama bottomlands when the four-footed army of the forest goes foraging by moonlight.

One Man's Fleet (a fact story) . . . . . CHARLES J. DUTTON 76
He built it to fight a single battle, and after the victory lived to see his ships rot and be forgotten. The chances are you never heard his name, but we could use plenty like him today.

A Question of Valor . . . . . CARL CLAUSEN 82
It was only a few yards from his tank to that *wadi* with the water hole, but crawling between the two the lieutenant learned the lesson of a lifetime.

Mountain Promise (a novelette) . . . . . GORDON MacCREAGH 86
Hatfield never read the papers back in Tennessee and here in the mountains of Burma no papers ever came. So how could the lank hillbilly know that the army from which he'd deserted had caught up with him at last?

The Tub and the Tortoise . . . . . WARD TANZER 104
For fun and rum kanakas work miracles, as the crew of the *Tiare* found when the Honu islanders drank her off the reef.

The Camp-Fire . . . . . Where readers, writers and adventurers meet 119

Ask Adventure . . . . . Information you can't get elsewhere 6

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Lost Trails . . . . . Where old paths cross 126

Cover painted for Adventure by E. Franklin Wittmack

Kenneth S. White, Editor

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ASK ADVENTURE

Information you can't get elsewhere

YOU can't hunt anything but Axis snakes in Africa today!

Request:—I am a biologist, explicitly a herpetologist, and recently became interested in West African reptiles through working over a local museum's collection and from a U. S. National Museum report on a Liberian Expedition. I have done field work, but almost always before under desert or semi-arid conditions, with a little sub-tropical experience in Mississippi, Louisiana and Southern Florida, this last, however, being under relatively civilized conditions. I am, therefore, almost a complete tyro when it comes to jungle work. I would appreciate any information you could give me concerning outfits, equipment, transportation, costs, etc., of a small expedition, say of two or three white men, for approximately three months work, in the interior largely, of Liberia, or perhaps Angola. Funds are somewhat limited and economy is definitely a point in view. About half a dozen fixed camps would be desired as bases for about two weeks collecting each, said base camps to be preferably rather remote, and to show a variety of geographical and geological conditions, but to be still not overly expensive to reach in both time and money.

—R. D. Hamilton
554 East End Ave.
Pittsburgh, Penna.

Reply by Major S. L. Glenister:—I have read your letter with great interest, and would like to help you. But I want to make it quite clear to you that the present is no time to even think of going on expeditions no matter how worthy the cause. This war affects the entire world, and the West Coast of Africa while possibly at the moment not suffering much, will probably be one of the scenes of activities.

Practically any of the West African provinces, British Sierra Leone, Gambia, or Nigeria, or Portuguese Angola, would serve your purpose equally well or even better than Liberia. But the British Government would not at this moment give you a visé to travel in their territories, and neither would the Portuguese. This could not be expected of them until after the war is over.

Then, again, you would have great difficulty in getting passage at any reasonable rate—and regular services are things of the past. Freights and passages are away up beyond the dreams of avarice.

After the war, when the world is free again, as free it will be, write to me again if you are still interested in such an expedition as you indicate. But, let me warn you, it will be a very expensive proposition. You cannot think of such a proposition on your own capital unless you are financially well off—you need museum or college backing (financial)—and this is hard to get unless you have a reputation in such a line. West Africa is unhealthy also. Though I have not suffered in health there means nothing—I am one of the very few.

THERE'S no fortune to be made in spider silk.

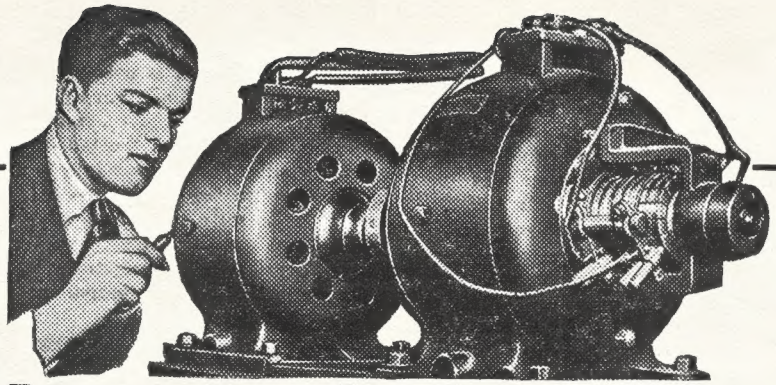
Request:—I wish to produce spider silk for optical instrument makers, and I would like to know the best possible reading material I should get, and where. I would like to know how the legs of a spider are to be attached to a small block of wood so that the thread may be slowly wound onto a spool—in short the mechanics of the thing—and, of course, what spiders would be best to breed for their silk — the species — where they abound—whether I can buy the stock to begin with, or whether I can get the stock by searching for same in some portions of stables, or forest.

Being close to Mexico, I have wondered if the Department of Agriculture could assist me to get special species of the female which would be the best producer of silk.

As they are fond of crickets, gnats and flies, what is the best way to propagate these?

—H. Sahl
1141 Echo Park Avenue,
Los Angeles, California.

(Continued on page 8)



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Electricity is the mighty power behind our Victory Program. Trained Electrical men are needed. You can PREPARE FOR YOUR PLACE in this field this amazingly easy way. **"Learn By Doing" in 90 days.** You don't need much money because **I'll finance your training.** Be ready for your place in our great Victory program and the great peace program to follow. READ EVERY WORD OF MY MESSAGE ON THIS PAGE.

How Can You Best Serve Your Country Now?

HOW CAN YOU BEST SERVE YOUR COUNTRY WHEN THE WAR IS OVER?

If You're Drafted

If you enter the Army as a trained electrical man, you are eligible to apply for higher rating and bigger pay. In both the Army and the Navy, rated Electrical Workers hold mighty important jobs—just as skilled Electrical Workers hold vital jobs in civilian life. AND THIS IS IMPORTANT: **Hundreds of new inventions** are being made these days, ready to be brought out after the war. **Electricity in Industry is increasing** by leaps and bounds. Both of these facts mean there will be a TREMENDOUS NEED **for trained Electrical Men after the war.** By getting your Electrical Training NOW, you will be ready for a BIG PAY, BIG FUTURE JOB after your service in the Army is over. When Peace comes, don't have to compete with thousands of untrained men. THE BEST JOBS WILL GO TO TRAINED MEN!

If You're Deferred

Everyone cannot serve in our Armed Forces—some may be too young — others too old — others with dependents — and others with some physical defect. If you cannot serve, you should not be discouraged or feel you cannot do your patriotic duty. FROM 16 to 50, EVERYONE WITH PROPER TRAINING CAN SERVE IN WAR INDUSTRY . . . turning out weapons and materials. **And remember**—Electricity in war time is essentially no different than Electricity in peace time. The same machinery that keeps industry running in war time will probably keep industry running when peace comes again. **Learn to run that machinery.** Be an all-around SKILLED ELECTRICIAN. That's the way to prepare yourself to help your country now and then be ready for a good-pay job when Peace comes again.

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RADIO—Right now I'm including an extra 4 weeks' Radio Course at no extra tuition charge.

H. C. LEWIS, President

COYNE Electrical School

500 South Paulina Street, Dept. C2-76, Chicago, Illinois

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COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL, Dept. C2-76,
500 S. Paulina St., Chicago, Ill.

Send me your **Free Book** and **tell me about your plans to help me.**

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY STATE

(Continued from page 6)

Reply by S. W. Frost:—You have an interesting problem but one, which I question is of much practical value. I am aware that spiders' silk has been used as reticles in optical instruments in the past but it is my opinion that other materials are being used today to produce the fine lines in such instruments. Manufacturers of range finders and similar optical instruments can give you better information as to the value of spiders' silk for this purpose.

The most promising species to experiment with is *Nephila clavipes.* This spider occurs in Southern United States and in Central America. It is a large species, the female measures nearly four inches with the legs outstretched although the body is scarcely an inch long. Other species of orb weavers of the genus Epeira also produce strong durable silk. The golden garden spider, *Miranda aurantia,* spins a thread that is likewise satisfactory for the purpose. This species is also an orb weaver and is generally common throughout North America.

The silk of Nephila clavipes surpasses in strength and beauty that of the silkworm. I have gathered the silk of this spider in Panama. It is golden in color and when wound upon a small stick, has the appearance of fine quality silk thread.

The literature on methods of obtaining silk from these spiders is meagre. Attempts have been made to take the silk from the egg cases much as silk is reeled from the cocoons of silk-worms. A better method, as you suggest, is to obtain the silk directly from the spiders.

There are certain difficulties attending the process of obtaining silk from spiders. First it is difficult to rear these spiders in confinement. They must be fed continuously in order to obtain silk. As they are predacious and feed upon living insects, it becomes more of a problem than that of feeding silkworms upon leaves. It is also difficult to keep the spiders separate so that they do not fight. As a means of silk production, in comparison with silkworms, the spider is decidedly out of the question. It requires approximately 500 spiders to produce one yard of silk or more than 5,000 spiders to produce enough silk to make a dress. You, however, are not concerned with this problem because quality is more important than quantity.

Another difficulty arises from the fact that the spider spins different kinds of silk. For example, inelastic silk, the kind you probably desire, is used in the construction of the foundation of the web and in the formation of the radii of the orb. The spiral is constructed of viscid or elastic silk. The latter would probably be undesirable for your purpose. Also, the spider usually spins four strands of silk at once which coalesce to form a single thread. An expert can split such a thread into its four component parts and get a finer thread.

The next problem, as you suggest, is how to hold the spider while the silken thread is being drawn out. Unfortunately I am not entirely familiar with the machinery used for this purpose. The spider is held in a tiny harness or stancion which fits over the body between the cephalothorax and the abdomen in such a way that the spider is held without injury and in such a way that the legs are kept away from the spinnerets. (The legs of Nephila are exceedingly long and this may prove a considerable problem.) By touching the spinnerets gently a thread will adhere which can be pulled out slowly. In making threads for fabrics, several strands are drawn from each of a considerable number of spiders at the same time and are twisted together into a single larger thread.

It seems that the French of Madagascar founded schools in the early days for the instruction of natives in the methods of rearing these spiders and reeling the silk from them. I have been unable to learn if this industry still flourishes.

If you are interested in carrying the subject further, I suggest the following references: "The Spider Book" by J. H. Comstock, 1940, "Spider's Silk and Its Uses" by Alex Petrunkevitch 1921 published in Natural History Vol. 21 and "On the Nephila Plumipes a Silk Spider of Southern Carolina" by B. G. Wilder, 1866, Proc. Soc. Nat. Hist. Vol. 10.

Dear Professor Frost:

I am exceedingly grateful to you for your kind letter on spider silk. Received also is a letter from the U. S. Bureau of Standards which states there is no great demand for this material, and hinting in a Governmental fashion that somebody has been giving me "the business."

Sincerely yours,
H. Sahl.

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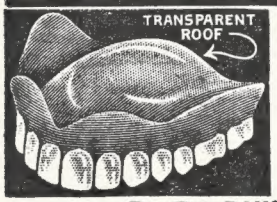

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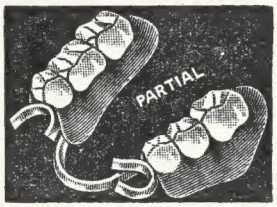

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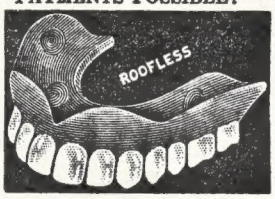

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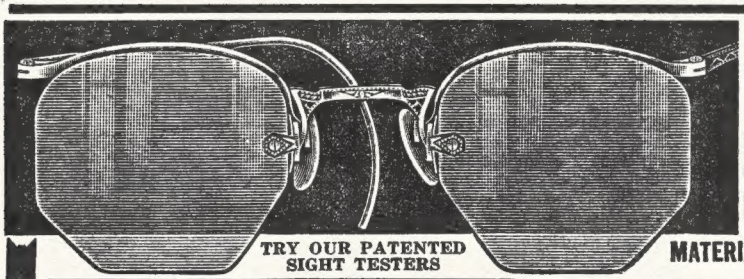

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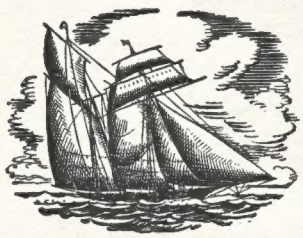

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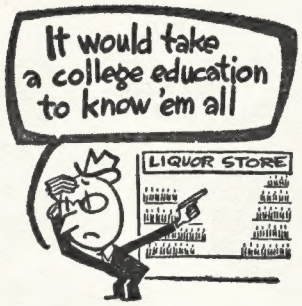

I Went Nuts in Liquor Stores
– by don herold

I used to go crazy in liquor stores, trying to decide which brand to buy. So many brands! The confusion is terrific for the layman liquor layer-inner.

Then a friend told me his system. He said "I've settled on Old Mr. Boston as MY brand —no matter what type of fine liquor I want."

Me—I have too, now.

It turns out that Old Mr. Boston is the one brand name under which you can buy almost every known type of fine liquor. Other big companies make many liquors, but they give them many different names. It's baffling! It's befuddling!

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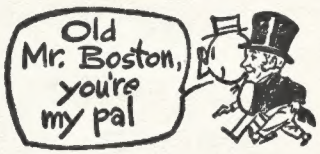

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So why not try the Old Mr. Herold plan and use Old Mr. Boston "as a handle by which to call your shots" when you want fine liquors?

ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN RICHARD FLANAGAN

The Sword of Qualoon

By

BARRÉ LYNDON

A BLIND man was calling through the Egyptian night, "*Allahu akbar*. . . . Allah is most great. Prayer is better than sleep . . . come to prayer!"

Bob Cunningham heard him, and he also heard whispering from behind a curtain of knotted cords which draped the doorway. The tones were noisy with Arabic gutturals, urgent, penetrating; it was this which had roused him, not the melodious voice of the *muezzin* in the native quarter.

Three men were in the arch beyond the doorway, dark against the moonlit courtyard. Abdi, the cripple, was crouched on one knee, still huddled in his blankets; near him the negro watchman stood with his nail-studded club hanging from both hands. Between them stooped a policeman, a stocky Armenian who wore a red *tarboosh* above the blue uniform, bright buttons and thick pants of a London bobby, imitated even to the duty band attached to his left sleeve.

Cunningham's sleep had been deep, the first in thirty-six hours. He peered at the men, blinking himself awake.

Reflected moonlight, sifting through closed jalousies, caught the whitewashed walls about him. Their plaster was much cracked and stained, and the mosaic on the floor had become broken, kicked up in many places. The room was very bare, because Cunningham had few possessions. His guns stood in a corner, oiled and clean and padlocked to the wall; there was an old army ammunition box near them, holding an assortment of shells, and that was padlocked, too.

He had a short nose, his chin was short, but he was tall enough to make most Arabs look up to meet his eyes; they appeared very gray because the lids, constantly half closed against desert glare, had become tanned. His face was burned brown-red, and a two-day stubble was dark on his jaw.

He sat up on the hard, narrow divan as the whispering continued. He called suddenly, "What is it, Abdi?"

The men looked in. Abdi pushed himself upright, reaching for his crutch. The cords over the doorway rippled as he entered, left foot dragging because of his bent leg. A thin blanket clung about his shoulders like a shawl; below was the grimy white of his *zaboot,* split from neck to waist, reaching gown-like to his ankles. He stood upright against his crutch; he was a proud cripple.

"There is a dead man," he said simply.

A dead man in Port Said was not unusual, but Abdi's tone had excitement in it. Cunningham worked fingertips against his scalp, rubbing vigorously, trying to rouse himself, while the distant *muezzin* turned sightless eyes to the sky in his midnight call, crying, "Allah giveth life and causeth death. There is no god but Allah!"

"Where is the dead man?" Cunningham asked.

Abdi answered very carefully, "He is by the house of the Yezidee woman."

Cunningham reacted abruptly, suddenly wide awake, pushing his blankets aside. He began to dress rapidly, kicking his feet into old mosquito boots; he dressed by moonlight because the electric bulbs had been removed from their sockets.

As he reached for a faded, short-sleeved shirt, he glanced toward a doorway near the divan, calling, "Larrimore!" And then, "Hey, Doc!" When he received no reply, he looked to where ladder-like steps led to rooms above and shouted, "Tweedie!" Still there was no answer.

"Where are they?" he asked.

"At the Manhattan Divan, *effendi,*" Abdi answered smoothly.

Cunningham grunted. From under his pillow he pulled the automatic which was always there now, its clip full of shells, and slipped it into a back pocket.

"Who is the dead man?" he asked.

"He is a dervish," Abdi said. Cunningham glanced sharply, then looked toward the policeman who pushed his way past the hanging cords; he was light-skinned, built thickly and he had heavy hands. He saluted clumsily.

"A guard killed him," he said.

"One of the guards of the Yezidee woman," Abdi added. "She does not know. She is at the Manhattan Divan."

That was a night club, elaborate and expensive, located in a bomb-proof cellar specially excavated from the watery sand on which Port Said stood. She went there almost every night, and she was what attracted Larrimore; Cunningham would probably have been there himself, only he had needed sleep.

He knotted a silk scarf about his neck, and patted the automatic securely in his pocket as he went quickly through the archway to the small courtyard beyond. It was paved with fine red tile, and a locust tree grew from the broken bowl of a fountain. A Cairene merchant had built the house thirty years before and its elegance had decayed, but the place suited Cunningham.

It suited Doctor Larrimore, too, because it was near the hospital. Young Captain Tweedie liked it, because he lived upstairs and could boast in letters home that he slept in a harem. He did not always mention the fact that it was disused.

Abdi followed Cunningham, his crutch thudding. He was the son of a potter in the Kharga Oasis and, just now, he went everywhere with Cunningham, who needed someone to guard his back. Abdi's lameness was little handicap; he was lithe, the crosspiece of his crutch was tipped with iron and he could use it murderously. The policeman came behind them, his truncheon swinging from his belt.

CUNNINGHAM walked swiftly along the narrow roadway outside, then turned down the Shari de Lesseps; the street was a vista of endless balconies, jutting at disorderly levels from wooden shacks or from stucco fronts plastered onto old Arab houses. All lamps were out, but glints of light showed from the shrouded taverns along the north sidewalk. This was arcaded against the noontime sun, and figures moved shadow-like in the darkness of the arches, turbanned and gowned, felt-capped or *tarbooshed.*

The moon showed shingles and signs

lettered in Greek, Arabic, French, Chinese, English; they were polyglot because the world's traffic, riding down the Suez Canal to Africa and the Orient, had kept Port Said swirling with men whose skins were pigmented from white through saffron-brown to black.

The traffic was halted now, and for part of every month the canal was blocked by bomb-blown sand, but men still came to Port Said. They arrived under escort from ships which had docked at Suez or Alexandria; others were picked up by watchful Egyptian police or were sent in by desert patrols.

They were escaped Greeks, and seamen from sunken Dutch or Norwegian ships; Arabs and red-haired Arishi; Syrians and Maltese and Armenians; Algerians who sought the Free French; Turks, Hebrews, lascars and Somalis. In a job which began nowhere and which never ended, Cunningham saw them all.

Some men he turned back to the police, or sent across to Navy House, and some he channeled through Tweedie for military scrutiny. From among the rest he singled out suspect Levantines and bought Arabs, crafty Berbers from Tripolitania and Italians passing as Maltese. Many of them were saboteurs, and a few clever ones were espionage agents but, mostly, they had been paid to start fires which would guide bombers to targets at Suez, or the airfields outside Ismailia, or the railroad to Jerusalem.

To work their mischief they had to cross the deserts which formed a great half-circle behind Port Said, stretching from the Sinai Peninsula around to Libya, unbroken except for the green strip of the Nile. It was hard for such men to get through the network of watchful desert patrols, and they found it still harder to get past Cunningham.

He had been posted to Port Said, front man for British Intelligence, because he knew the deserts. He had gone into them almost ten years before, when he had been fresh from home, impelled by the odd liking of some Englishmen for hard living on the fringe of civilization. In lonely outposts of the Sudan and Nubia, in the Red Sea wastelands and on Sinai, he had come to understand Arab ways. Administration had moved him around as a commissioner who could settle disputes at wells, check raids and blood-feuds.

The Arabs appreciated a man who, unlike themselves, always made good his word, and they had admiration for one who could outstay their camel riders and not show fatigue. Ultimately, they beban to call him "el-Cunningham" which, by its familiarity, marked their respect.

Although he had been very reluctant to exchange the deserts for raddled Port Said, the town was showing him that there were many things in life other than arid sand and scorching sunshine; things which he had half forgotten. And if he missed his work of settling disputes and incipient tribal wars, there was plenty of trouble growing here in the native quarter.

The quarter was big. There were almost five hundred blocks of it, stretching out along the sandpit. Its rich, struggling life was made uneasy by bombings, by stories of hostile armies in the west and across the sea, but the natives were disturbed most of all by the presence of Sarie in Port Said.

Abdi had called her the "Yezidee woman" because, in front of Cunningham, he dared not use the name by which all natives knew her. When she passed in the streets, women averted their eyes and covered their children's faces so that Sarie would not see them. They clutched blue beads, or reached to touch the blue gown of a neighbor, because anything blue was a talisman against evil.

Sarie had the deep-shapen lips and the black-lashed, almond eyes of women in paintings on the walls of the temple at Luxor and the tombs of Thebes. Strains of blood, thinned by more than three thousand years, had met again and blazed to life in her slender beauty. But the natives hated her.

Unofficially, she had been exiled to Port Said, partly so that Cunningham could watch over her. The Egyptian commissioner of police, Kamil Bey, disliked having her in the town, but there was no other place to which she could be sent, and wherever she went she would be pursued.

CUNNINGHAM arrived between buildings which degenerated to sun-bleached wooden shacks as the street neared the native quarter. Sarie's house was set where the long city blocks ended, and the painted doorway to the courtyard stood open. No crowd had gathered, because no natives ever paused by Sarie's gate. But there were fearful watchers at every window and nearby balcony; the news had spread that a man lay dead by her house.

A policeman waited in the yard, and with him were two of Sarie's watchmen. She had four, chosen by Cunningham; two looked after the old Arab house, and two others always rode with her when she went about the town. All were muscular Nubians, well-fed, sleek enough to be eunuchs.

Windows jutted above the courtyard, beautifully latticed, throwing slants of black shadow from the bright moon. Bougainvillea grew against one wall, and two young date palms stood at the far end of a sunken pool which was thick with lotus blooms.

The dead dervish lay near the palms. He had been caught peering into a lower window and, at sight, one of the Nubians had killed him with a single blow from his club, catching the man at the nape of the neck.

The club was a heavy weapon, its head a solid mass of nails; it was a pastime of watchmen in the town to hammer into their clubs every nail they could find.

Cunningham used the shrouded beam of a flashlamp, picking out the figure against the smooth tiling.

The man was a Yezidee dervish. He wore a cloth about his waist and his tattered robe had broken away from its girdle. His hair was wild, like his staring eyes. He had a thin beard, and his dropped jaw strained the little scars on his cheeks. These scars were rounded, caused by punctures with hot iron pins; others showed on his chest, and all were from superficial wounds, self-inflicted during ceremonies of the cult to which he belonged.

Cunningham, bending to look at the dark face, became aware of horses approaching at a gallop. The policeman and the Nubians stirred. Roused dogs began barking with the sharp nervousness they now had at night.

Three horses were coming up a side street, galloping wildly. Kamil Bey led them, using a crop to whip his mount on; two police troopers followed in a flurry of sand and flying stones, with lean dogs leaping from alleys and doorways, barking angrily.

Gasoline was short, so Kamil used a horse instead of a police car. He preferred the horse, anyway, because he loved violence and movement.

Figures roused on rickety balconies as he raced along the moonlit street, holding his horse against pot-holes in the roadway, dogs raging in a growing pack behind. He clattered across the Shari de Lesseps, then reined in so abruptly by the courtyard doorway that his mount reared. Dogs skidded through the dust, wheeling and tumbling to dodge the animal's plunging hoofs; then Kamil was out of the saddle, leaving his mount for the troopers to catch and hold.

"Hello, Bob!" he called, and stood laughing.

He was slim, supple, not much older than Cunningham. He was black-eyed, good-looking because his family had Circassian blood, and there was a warm ruddiness in his olive-colored skin. His scarlet *tarboosh* had a blue tassel, and he wore light-colored breeches below his uniform tunic.

As a boy, Kamil had been instructed in the ninety-nine names of Allah, then his land-owner father had sent him to Paris, where Kamil had attended to his own instruction. His education had been completed in England, and there he had acquired an independence which made him want to be something more than a rich man's son.

He had a generous spirit and clever daring, and it was entirely by his own ruthless efforts that he had come to be commissioner of police in Port Said, where lawlessness is very varied and challenging.

He stepped into the courtyard, the police saluting and the Nubians stiffening.

"Sorry to have turned you out, Bob." His English was easy, colloquial. "Only

this matter happens to concern you!"

"I knew these devils would find Sarie sooner or later," Cunningham answered quietly.

They moved around the pool. Kamil looked at the lax form, slapping his riding boots with a bone-handled crop which had been a gift from friends in a Leicestershire hunt. He asked casually, "Who killed him?"

One of the Nubians stepped forward, and Cunningham turned the flashlamp on him. The man was afraid; his skin was bloodless at the corners of his heavy lips, and his gaze was uncertain. The fact that he had killed a Yezidee would forever mark him to others.

"You did well," Kamil said, then glanced about the shadowy yard, and at the window near which the dead man lay.

"You know, he probably just wanted to look at Sarie," he commented.

Cunningham nodded. The dervish, following his strange beliefs, had sought no more than to catch sight of her, to walk where she had walked, or to touch something that she had worn.

"But it was what he intended to do afterwards that matters," Kamil Bey added.

He stepped closer to the dead man. Abdi, the Nubians and the two policemen all leaned forward. Cunningham moved up, bringing the light from the flashlamp full on the still figure as Kamil reached out, using the tip of his crop to lift the torn robe aside.

It fell clear, and the light showed a slender iron spike stuck through the dervish's waistcloth, near the hip. It was more than a foot long; it had a flattened haft, looped with little chains, and the point was bright, newly sharpened. It was a weapon which could slip easily and silently between a man's ribs, stilling his heart.

"That was meant for you, my friend," Kamil said softly, "after he had seen Sarie!"

Cunningham realized that. He asked quietly, "I wonder if there are any more of these fellows about?"

"We'll send to the Divan for Sarie," Kamil suggested. "If they're hiding, she'll draw them into the open."

Sarie

CHAPTER II

THE YEZIDEE WOMAN

THE big cellar which housed the Manhattan Divan was just off the Shari el-Ahram, where it was not likely to be hit by bombs aimed at the quays. Bright light spotted a square of polished flooring, and a Ghaziya girl was dancing as her people once had danced to please the Pharaohs.

Her costume had been taken from a temple mural, and her swirling skirt was no more than a film of yellow silk, held by a girdle of brilliants. She wore a gilt headdress and little else, except a jeweled neckpiece and bangles. In a corner, native pipes and viols skirled through the tapping of tall drums; in her hands brass castanets rippled, their sound as exciting as her own tawny appeal.

Shaded electrics made blurs of color in the smoky air, lighting faces at the jammed and crowded tables. The fame of the Manhattan Divan had spread all through the Middle East; every night the place drew airmen on leave from Ismailia, colonials in from Libya, broad-skulled Syrians and Maltese traders who were growing rich from the war, British army officers and naval men, Greeks and Frenchmen.

There were the wives of attachés, up from Cairo; escorted nurses from the hospital on the beach; slim Circassian dance hostesses and mask-faced Armenian girls. Against the walls stood waiters, white statues in red *tarbooshes* and red girdles.

It was the first time that the Ghaziya girl had appeared, but Doctor Larrimore was not watching her; he was studying Sarie. He had wide, observing eyes which matched his adventurous and inquiring American mind, and he had come to the conclusion that Sarie was younger than himself by three or four years; he was twenty-seven. Also, he had suddenly realized that she used kohl on the edges of her eyelids, not mascara on her eyelashes.

It was the kohl, made as the ancients made it from rose-water and the burned black of frankincense, which stressed the distinctive shape of her eyes and lent them such luster.

By day, as Larrimore knew, she appeared much like anyone else, except that her clothes had a French *chic*. But in the evenings it pleased her to dress very differently; or, perhaps, the desire was in her blood because she came from people of the Nile. Fair-skinned, their line went back to the dynasties of ancient Egypt, descendants from a great Mediterranean race whose land had been overrun by Bedouins and Nubians, Levantines and Arabs.

Her gown had a collar of long beads; they were green, and copper turquoise, madder and yellow and cobalt blue, like the faience necklaces of Egyptian queens. She was extravagant enough for any queen, and she appeared to have limitless jewelry. Although, just now, she wore only a single armlet, it was made from three heavy gold circlets, welded together and jeweled.

She had a soft, rich beauty which Larrimore found stirring. Her hair was dark and her hands were slender, nails and palms stained with henna so that they were tinted faintly orange-red, making them warm to see and stressing the delicacy of her fingers.

Young Captain Tweedie, who was given to romantic exaggeration, said it was very right and proper that she should have been exiled to Port Said; it was well known to be the wickedest town in the world while, according to him, Sarie was the most dangerous woman in Egypt.

It was because of Sarie, natives said, that the once flourishing city of Suakin now stood abandoned on its island in an inlet of the Red Sea, a thousand miles south of Port Said. Its quays lay empty, its streets were desolate and its remarkable Arab houses were rotting under the Sudan sun.

It was, they said, more than just a trick of destiny that her mother should have died in bringing her to life there, just as the town itself had afterwards died. And it was, they believed, something more than ordinary fate that the men of her merchant family should have been stricken by plague, leaving her wealth to match a beauty which seemed to have come to her from the past.

CRIPPLED Abdi was polite when he called Sarie the *Yezidee sitt*. . . . Yezidee woman. Arabs in the town called her *Shaitan sitt*, and dared no more than whisper the words.

That name came from the dervishes who constantly tried to get at her, and who usually died in attempting it. They were an offshoot of the hated and mistrusted Yezidees, who were scattered all through the Middle East and beyond.

They were feared because they worshipped Shaitan who, by some perverted logic, they believed to be overlord of the earth. To other men, Shaitan is known by other names: Satan, and Lucifer, lord only of evil. The dervishes believed that Shaitan had been created on the island of Suakin, named as "Isle of Spirits."

Sarie was the only child not a native ever to have been born there and, because of this, the dervishes found omens in her family tragedy, and in the death of the city. They watched her growing beauty. They saw her inherit wealth which appeared to put at her feet all that the world had to offer. And, suddenly, they claimed that she was Lilith, wife of Shaitan, reborn to earth in the place where Shaitan had been created, come to restore the one-time power of the Yezi-

dees, come to avenge the ancient massacres by which the sect had been suppressed.

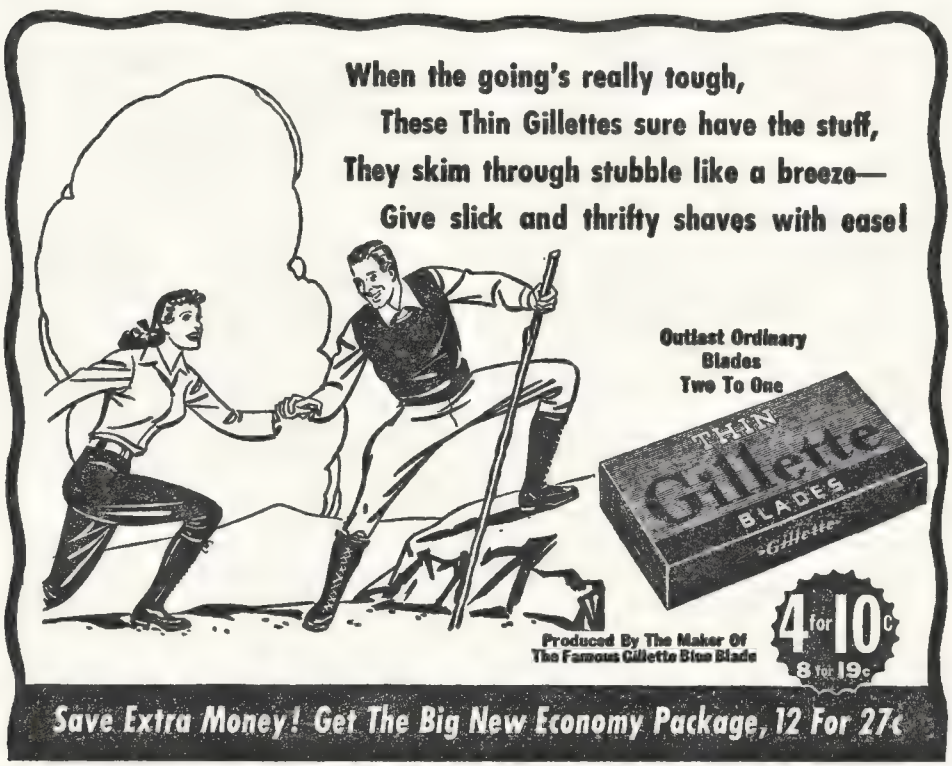
It was the Yezidees who built the remarkable seven towers of Shaitan, which reach out from the mountains of Iran and stretch in a chain all across Asia, and which all men outside the sect believe radiate evil. The dervishes by Suakin began to erect an eighth tower on the island, rousing half Egypt and all the Sudan in fear. They restored the ugly rites and ceremonies of an older time, following their long-hidden scripture, using force to subdue local natives who tried to check them.

Until then, neither Sarie nor anyone else had known the workings of their half Oriental minds. She had lived normally, and it was when she returned from travel in England and on the continent that the dervishes attempted to carry her to the island. Cunningham wrecked the tower in which they would have shut her. He hung four of them for murders, and the rest he drove into the desert, or away across the Red Sea.

He knew that many had stolen back and were hidden near Suakin. They persisted in seeking Sarie, and they were eager to kill Cunningham because he gaurded her and kept her from them, and because he had balked them in the beginning. It was difficult to deal with them; they were not very important against the background of the war, and they were very elusive.

Sarie had endured the situation for three years, dreading that the dervishes might take her away again, unable to escape the thing in which she had become involved, always hoping that Cunningham would find a solution which would give her freedom.

Because of the mark that had been put upon her, natives believed that it was *Shaitan sitt* who had brought the evil of war to the Middle East. Had she gone amongst them, it would have been at the peril of her life. So she was not permitted to sail on Lake Menzala, which flanked Port Said. She could not go through the native quarter, or walk anywhere except in main streets, or go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outside the town itself, at any time.

She was always guarded and she was not allowed to leave Egypt because, as Larrimore understood it, things were now developing which could have widespread effect. What these were, he did not know.

He had never before met anyone in the least like Sarie and, for all the strangeness of her situation, she had a warmth and charm and friendliness which he found fascinating, quite apart from the oddly mysterious quality of her loveliness.

He could not yet determine whether his interest was growing personal, or whether he was merely curious. He was curious about many things, and it was this which had drawn him to medicine.

LARRIMORE had an odd philosophy about his work, and about his own life. He wanted to strike a line of research to which he could devote himself. He felt that if he then produced one thing of real value, he would have justified his existence; thereafter he could relax and enjoy the abundance which his father had gained from close application to the sugar and molasses industry in Philadelphia.

Larrimore worked hard in his own way, enjoyably interested in what he was doing. He had come out with an ambulance unit almost a year before, accompanying the Free French to Lake Chad, with ideas about doing field work in tropical diseases, and then concentrating on one of them. When hostilities spread wider, he raced to Port Said, and now he was waiting for some official response to his proffered services. He expected to be ordered to Australia or, possibly, down to the new base in Eritrea and he was growing a little impatient about the delay.

In the meantime, he remained in Port Said because the native hospital gave opportunities for interesting exploratories, and for the experimental treatment of patients with the most amazing recuperative powers. Also, he had discovered that the native quarter could produce a great variety of intriguing disabilities, many of which were almost entirely unknown to medical circles in Philadelphia.

He had formed the habit of looking in at the Manhattan Divan, staying only if Sarie were there. Tonight he remarked how her cheekbones, set a little high, gave shape to her eyes, and how dense were her long lashes. As though she felt his gaze she turned, looking at him for a long moment. Then her glance went beyond him and she reached for her glass, smiling, nodding as she raised it in a little gesture, drinking to someone who sat behind Larrimore.

He knew who it was and, to capture her attention, he leaned across the table, gesturing toward the sinuous Ghaziya girl as the music died away.

"Is she very good?" he asked.

Sarie sipped champagne, then spoke through applauding handclaps, and the clatter of swizzle sticks against glasses. "Ghaziya girls are professional." Sarie tended to give full measure to every syllable, and that lent added charm to her low voice. "They learn these dances while they are very young."

"That's how you dance," Larrimore told her. She glanced sharply, her smile fading a little, and he explained quickly, "As though you'd learned very early."

She still looked at him. "Well," she said slowly, "I did."

The cellar was noisy then. Lively R.A.F. pilots were shouting for an encore. Army officers and colonials were pounding their tables, calling with them; even stolid naval men were yelling. But the lights switched on over the dance floor, and applause petered out under the blare of a band formed by eight French negroes from the Comoro Islands, trained in Marseilles, and who had more rhythm than melody.

"Will you dance?" Larrimore asked.

"Larry, I've just promised Prince Mikki!" She touched his arm for a moment, smiling as she whispered. "I'll have one with him, then you come and claim me, eh?"

He nodded, and stood up as she looked past him again. Mikki came to the table, reaching for her outstretched hand, making a little bow to Larrimore. He was an attaché, lean, handsome in the swagger-cut, dark blue uniform of the Turkish air force. Above thirty, he had a care-

less challenge which charmed women, and they could sense that he was dangerous.

Like a lot of men in Port Said, he had mixed blood, although he was from Turkey. Through his father, he was linked to the lawless and violent janissaries of Constantinople; by his mother he had both Arab and Nubian strains, but that did not show except, perhaps, about his skin. His cheeks and jaw had a queer texture, a surface roughness against which his lips were very clearly marked, their edges sharp.

He swung Sarie out to the floor, and both were laughing. The band stopped its blaring and the leader crouched over his saxophone, muting it. The tune became clearer and the rhythm deeper, subtle. It was the first time that Sarie had danced that evening and when Prince Mikki was her partner the Comoro boys played only to them, partly because he always tipped them heavily, but more because they liked Sarie's litheness and grace.

LARRIMORE was watching the dance floor when he became aware that Tweedie had slipped into Sarie's empty chair. He had a clear complexion and cheerful gray eyes and fair hair, and he had a light manner which hid the acumen which made him able to work in liaison with Cunningham. He wore light-tinted, tropical khaki, with the badges of a Surrey regiment. He had been hit in the left elbow during the first Libyan campaign, and he could not quite straighten that arm now.

He glanced at Larrimore, then looked toward Prince Mikki. "I don't like him either," he said softly. When Larrimore did not answer, Tweedie added, "And military attachés are all spies, anyway." He chuckled happily. "I'll let you know if we shoot him!"

"He can't do much spying in Port Said," Larrimore commented.

Tweedie tippled at the glass of Scotch he had brought with him, then said, "He spends his time collecting old Arab weapons, but something must be keeping him here!" He looked toward Sarie as the band changed its tempo. The tune became almost lost, replaced by pure rhythm. Sarie's smooth step became faster, Mikki's matching it.

Larrimore asked, "I wonder where she learned to dance like that?"

"Bob could tell you," Tweedie answered, then sat back as he looked across the cellar toward the entrance steps. "Hello. . . !" he exclaimed softly.

The black drapes which hung there had been parted by one of Kamil Bey's troopers. The man was staring around and behind him was a Nubian guard from Sarie's carriage, peering in, the light catching his eyes. The trooper saw Tweedie, and gave him a half-beckoning salute.

"Just a minute, Larry," Tweedie said, and went quickly away.

Larrimore remained watching Sarie. She moved very beautifully. She was lovely to see under the lights and, perhaps, a little strange with her darkened eyes and tinted hands. Prince Mikki danced perfectly and Larrimore regarded him grimly, waiting for the tune to end. As it neared its close, he saw Tweedie coming away from the cellar steps, cutting between the tables, making straight for Sarie.

When the dance ended she stood clapping as the Arabs clapped, hitting her left palm with the fingers of her right hand. Larrimore, moving toward her, saw Tweedie touch her arm.

"Bob Cunningham's back," he said, and she turned sharply. "He wants you to go to your house at once." Her smile faded, and Prince Mikki looked quickly when Tweedie added, "They've just killed a Yezidee there."

She became still. Larrimore saw her hands drop to her sides, and dread grew in her eyes as Tweedie went on quietly, "There may be others about."

The band began to blare a new tune. She moved to the edge of the dance floor and paused, staring at Tweedie again. He waited for a moment, then asked, "Will you come now?"

"But it is dangerous for her to go out!" Prince Mikki's voice was throaty. "I know about these Yezidees."

Tweedie said curtly, "We'll see that nothing happens."

Sarie looked at Mikki. "I've been ex-

pecting them," she told him slowly.

She remained standing there and, now that her first alarm had passed, it seemed to Larrimore that her expression became almost speculative, and some secret thought made her smile a little. Tweedie waited again before he reminded her, "Bob said . . . immediately!"

"I'll take you home," Prince Mikki suggested but, again, Tweedie checked him.

"If you don't mind," he said firmly and looked at Larrimore, who hurried back to the table for Sarie's bag and cloak. Tweedie signed to the waiting trooper, who sent the Nubian racing up the steps to call her carriage.

"Goodnight, Mikki," Sarie said softly, and moved away.

Prince Mikki gazed after her, his head tilted, his eyes half shuttered by their curiously smooth lids. He saw Larrimore put the cloak about her shoulders, and she went out with him, Tweedie and the trooper following.

The cellar steps mounted between dark walls, made bizarre by gilded cartouches and Egyptian designs. Sarie climbed them quickly, still smiling to herself.

THE wheels of Sarie's carriage jounced out of potholes along a narrow by-street from the Manhattan Divan, and she swayed on the lumpy leather seat, sitting between Larrimore and Tweedie.

The vehicle was an old victoria, and her guards balanced on flimsy steps at either side. One man wore an embroidered waistcoat, split halfway down the back; the other had a sash spun about the top of his pants, colorful against his slack, black skin.

The Nubians did not seem to mind the chill night air, but the Arab driver was huddled in his robes, and he worked constantly with the whip, keeping his horses at a fast trot. The guards held their clubs handily and the trooper, who rode behind, had his sword drawn.

The moonlit street was silent, still. Its buildings were fronted by tiers of wooden balconies, supported on timbers rising from the sidewalks. The balconies were latticed or railed, dark, and above them showed ramshackle roofs which gaped, half-finished; Arabs believe it unlucky ever quite to complete a house.

Thin-tailed Egyptian cats, scavenging the road's edge, cringed as the carriage came up, then slipped resentfully into the shadows, looking back. The horses' hoofs were quieted by thick dust, but ears were quick in Port Said and sleep was light, and swart faces jerked abruptly into sight at balconies and window spaces, staring down.

The air was spiced from the day's heat, holding odors which the night could not kill: the dry scent of pounded herbs and roots in an attar's shop, the malt pungence of cafés. Just for an instant, Larrimore caught the sharp, unmistakable smell of hashish, like cucumber.

The guards, the alert trooper and Tweedie watched the way ahead, gazing at every darkened corner. Larrimore watched with them, sitting tensely, and he was surprised to hear how steady and quiet was Sarie's voice when she spoke. "This means that the Yezidees have found me again."

"It looks like it." The moon threw shadows from the peak of Tweedie's cap, but his lips were visible, set and tight.

"Then it isn't really wise to keep me any longer in Port Said," Sarie suggested, and she laughed a little.

"That fellow was after Bob, not you!" Tweedie exclaimed.

"But he was at my house," Sarie protested.

"He wanted to sort of anoint himself by getting near you, or handling something you've used," Tweedie said. "Then he'd have gone after Bob!"

She did not answer. She was smiling, and Tweedie was puzzled by her manner. He looked at her while they rocked together as the old hack carried them on, harness chains clinking and iron-tired wheels crunching through the dust.

"The Yezidees know they'll never get you until they've put Bob out of the way," Tweedie added.

"This is how they came after me at Assuan, and Luxor, and Cairo, and Alexandria. Just one man at first!" Sarie was following her own thoughts. "One tonight, and more tomorrow and still more the day after!" Her tone was light, almost amused.

"They can't get into Port Said so easily." Tweedie returned his gaze to the road. "That's why you're here!"

The town faced the sea. It was flanked on one side by broad Lake Menzala, and on the other by the wide harbor of the canal entrance. The only highway into Port Said ran between the lake and the canal, beside the railroad track, and it was always under guard.

"They will come somehow," Sarie said, and her next words revealed what was in her mind. "I think Bob will have to let me leave Egypt now!"

She laughed a little and Larrimore understood, then, why her first fear had changed to something that was almost pleasure. In the coming of the Yezidees, she saw a chance of freedom.

Tweedie said quietly, "I'm afraid they won't let you go."

"But, after all, it's only some crazy dervishes with superstitious ideas," she began impatiently, and he cut in, "It's rather more than that, now." She shook her head, but he went on, "Bob says things are happening in the deserts!"

She laughed at him. "You always exaggerate so!" then she braced herself as the carriage swung in a wide turn to cross the Shari Eugénie, which had been the Boulevard Eugénie before all street names had been changed to Arabic.

There was a glimpse of stucco buildings, and acacia trees between the unlit street lamps, then the victoria's wheels swished into the dust of another side street, now only two blocks from Sarie's house.

"I hope there is more than one Yezidee!" She laughed again. "I hope lots of them come. Then Bob and Kamil will have to let me go!" She glanced at Larrimore as she said, "Egypt has grown to be a not very beautiful prison."

IT WAS while she spoke that Larrimore saw police in the street ahead. They had their truncheons out and were moving stealthily, blue-clad shapes peering into black doorways and the dim spaces between buildings. When they heard the carriage, they turned and watched it pass; when it had gone by they remained gazing after it.

Some police were by the next intersection, and it was halfway along the next block that Larrimore half-glimpsed a figure crouched in an alley entrance. He glanced back as the carriage went on, and saw the man leap out.

He had a fuzz of hair and a fluttering brown robe, and he stooped where Sarie's carriage wheels had left deep marks. He scooped his hands in the dust, flinging it in a cloud over his head and shoulders as the police also saw him.

A whistle shrilled along the street, and the trooper turned in his saddle. Wildly he yelled, "Yezidee!" wrenching his mount about as more whistles screamed. The carriage driver reined in and Sarie's guards leaped clear, one flinging his club at the figure now darting back to the alley.

The weapon spun end over end, its nail-tipped head flashing, falling short. The Yezidee vanished as the trooper charged after him, dismounting at the alley mouth, sword leveled, shouting. He did not attempt to go in after the man.

While the carriage horses still plunged, Cunningham appeared around the corner ahead, Abdi at his back, making flying strides with his crutch. Larrimore spilled from the coach with Tweedie before it stopped, and Sarie stood up, clinging to the folded top, staring back through the swirling dust.

"Stay there!" Tweedie called, but she jumped out, starting toward the alley, and her guards at once closed in about her.

Cunningham snatched a truncheon from a running policeman and, as he came up, Tweedie yelled, "Use your gun, Bob!" Cunningham pushed the trooper aside, his unshaven face intent as he looked down the alley. Kamil Bey suddenly appeared at the far end, spurring his horse into the narrow way, his sword glinting.

Abdi hopped behind Cunningham when he started forward, and the cripple had his crutch lifted like a club. Police made a little circle behind the trooper, standing still, watching.

The alley was full of shadows thrown by lean-to roofs, tilted wooden walls and flat-topped sheds. Kamil stood up in

his stirrups as he rode slowly to meet Cunningham, and they were still far apart when Abdi yelled thinly: *"Effendi!"*

A form showed at the edge of a flat, low roof and moonlight caught the dervish as he flung himself down. Hair stood out from the top of his head, metal rings swung from his ear-lobes and iron hoops, about his neck, jangled against his scarred chest.

He dropped heedless of hurt to himself, his sharpened spike held to strike. There was an instant before Cunningham jerked himself aside so that the spike slashed past. His truncheon snapped down, then he hit again with the ruthlessness of a man defending his life, and the dervish pitched to the ground, slithering.

He lay quite still, the spike showing against his hand, held by the little chains wound about his knuckles.

CHAPTER III

"YOU CAN'T LEAVE EGYPT!"

SARIE'S fingers were trembling as she unfastened her cloak. The Yezidee had made a terrifying figure, plunging at Cunningham, and she had just seen the other dead dervish in the courtyard of

Sharpened spike held to strike, the dervish flung himself down.

her house. She was no longer inclined to treat their advent lightly.

She handed the cloak to a *fellahin* maid, a peasant girl whose frightened eyes glanced uncertainly toward Cunningham; his unshaven face and roughed-up hair made him very formidable while, behind him, Kamil Bey looked grim and troubled. They went with Sarie across the beautifully tessellated floor, Larrimore following.

Sarie's house had been built by an Arab. The main room had a painted wooden ceiling, and tinted rays from a hanging lamp seemed to be caught in the air, held by a faint haze of smoke which came from fragrant cascarilla bark, burning slowly in a bronze vessel.

The sunken bowl of a fountain formed a cool mosaic of alabaster and Algerian onyx and green malachite. Wall divans were set where the floor was raised. Red-tinged tiles made mellow panels on the walls, showing between black-out curtains that concealed the intricate lattice of wide windows.

Two Sudanese servants were setting laden trays on stools by the divans, big men in yellow turbans and gold-laced

jackets. They salaamed and went out with the girl, bare feet brushing softly. Sarie began to pour coffee. She used both hands to still their quivering, and Cunningham spoke cheerfully, trying to ease her tension.

"I'm not dressed to pay a social call." He looked down at his dusty mosquito boots and wrinkled pants, one hand rasping the stubble on his jaw.

"This isn't a social call." She gave him a little smile then, for a moment, remained gazing at him. He was very real and human, much different from Kamil, and she knew that he was the only sure bulwark between herself and things which she dreaded. Passing a filled cup, she asked, "Where's Pat Tweedie?"

"He's waiting until that Yezidee can move under his own power." Cunningham laughed, and his voice was quick, because he had the peculiar elation which comes to a man who has just evaded death. He handed the cup to Kamil, and said, "We'll go to the lock-up later, and find out how they got into the town."

Kamil nodded and he was concerned because he knew that the advent of the Yezidees would stir the native quarter. He dropped his crop and his scarlet *tarboosh* to a divan, then sat down, regarding Sarie thoughtfully.

Cunningham handed another cup to Larrimore, who was looking curiously at dishes on one of the hammered brass trays. "Those are manna cakes." Cunningham pointed. "Try one."

"They're only flour, and gum from tamarisk trees," Sarie called, "but you'll like them."

Larrimore nibbled at a sweet-tasting little cookie, and stood looking about the room. It was the first time that he had been inside Sarie's house, and it was different from anything that he had expected.

Cunningham sat on a soft divan, almost facing Sarie. He reached out to take the cup she offered, and she stood looking from him to Kamil as she said, "The Yezidees have followed me all the way up the Nile now!" Then, with her next words, Cunningham understood why she had insisted that they stop in for coffee. She asked, "Wouldn't it be better if I left Egypt altogether?"

"It would," Kamil answered, "but I'm afraid you can't go."

"Why not?" She looked sharply toward Cunningham. "Why not, Bob?"

He said nothing. He sipped at the pure, strong coffee then glanced at Kamil, who answered her slowly, "The reason is nothing to do with Bob, or with the British." He went on, "This isn't their country, and they're only concerned with military defense." He added quietly, "The order comes from our own people, Sarie."

The silver holder about his cup rattled as he returned it to the tray. Larrimore seated himself at the end of a divan, watching Sarie. She had become quite still, looking at Kamil. He bent forward.

"Have you heard anything about a man who calls himself Ibn Abdallah?" His tone was strained.

Cunningham said, "A man who goes about with his head shaved, and his skull varnished! He's somewhere in Arabia."

"No." She looked from one to the other. "No."

"Sarie," Cunningham's voice had an odd quality now, "say his name in the Arab way."

Obediently, she responded slowly: "*Ibn . . . Abd . . . Allah.*"

"What does that mean?" he asked, although he already knew.

She said, "It means . . . Son of the Servant of Allah."

"Which is just the opposite from *Shaitan sitti!*" Kamil exclaimed sharply.

Sarie stiffened, but she still looked at Cunningham, who went on, "He's a desert prophet." After a moment, he added, "In times of trouble, the Arabs always look for a new prophet to come out of the deserts. And they're very troubled now, Sarie."

ALL over the Middle East, the calm of Moslem peoples had been disrupted by the war. It had brought a tide of distress which, rising still, threatened to sweep across their lands and their lives. Five times a day the faithful turned toward

Mecca, and wise ones among them were praying that a new Mahomet might arise to save them.

"Minor prophets are always turning up," Sarie's tone had suddenly become defensive. "They never amount to anything!"

"But Ibn Abdallah is gathering followers against the Yezidees," Cunningham said.

"And against me?" she asked sharply.

He nodded, and she knew that such a prophet could win a mighty following.

"You're now regarded as the figurehead of the Yezidees," Cunningham went on, "with the dervishes at Suakin as your supreme disciples. And Ibn Abdallah says that your coming has loosed great evil in the world."

"Meaning the war, of course!" She smiled a little.

"He says the war won't end, and there'll be no peace, while the Yezidees continue to exist. That's the danger," Cunningham added.

She read into his words a meaning which made her fingers tighten against one another, and some of the color began to leave her face.

"This has all the makings of something pretty serious," Kamil told her. "It's developing that way."

"Has real trouble begun yet?" She was watching Cunningham.

"Not yet."

"You don't want trouble, of course." She spoke slowly, as though some other thought was shaping itself in her mind.

Kamil leaned forward. "If Ibn Abdallah gets a big enough following, he can start the next worst thing to a holy war against the Yezidees," he said. "That'd throw the whole Middle East into a turmoil, just when we least want it!"

"You already have one war on your hands." Sarie still spoke slowly.

"The only chance would be if he makes for Suakin," Kamil added, "and is content with wiping out the dervishes there."

"And me with them?" Sarie asked abruptly. "Is that why I'm being kept in Egypt?"

"No!" Cunningham jerked upright.

"Ibn Abdallah won't be satisfied unless he gets me as well!"

"Sarie!" Kamil started toward her and Larrimore came to his feet, staring.

"And if I were permitted to leave Egypt, I shouldn't be available!" Sarie exclaimed.

"There's nothing of that sort!" Cunningham said sharply.

"I beg you to believe that!" Kamil faced her, disturbed.

"It seems the only reason why I have to stay!" and her tone was challenging.

"Wherever you went, you'd be followed!" Kamil said.

"We can best look after you here!" Cunningham added. "And I'll tell you this, Sarie." He paused for a moment, holding her gaze. "Both Kamil and I would like to see you out of the country. We've argued for that, down in Cairo."

"But they think you are safest here," Kamil added.

"And I can assure you that there's no idea of giving way to the demands of any Arab out of the deserts, prophet or no prophet!" Cunningham went on grimly. "If anything develops I'll take some

NO FINER DRINK...with fan...or player

PEPSI-COLA

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Purity... in the big big bottle

men down to Suakin, and I'll make a real job of it this time, probably before Ibn Abdallah can come into action!"

She answered quietly, "I'm sorry if I misunderstood."

Kamil stepped away, still watching her, while Cunningham said, "If you're wondering why we don't do something now, it's because we think it wiser to let matters come to a head. Then we'll try to settle everything once and for all!"

She smiled a little. "I should have known better," she said, but to Larrimore it seemed that she was still doubtful. Cunningham realized that and stepped to face her squarely. Before he could speak, something about his expression made her smile real.

"Please forgive me," she said softly. "And drink your coffee!"

He looked at her for a moment longer, then nodded, satisfied.

Kamil reached for his coffee and laughed suddenly, his manner changed. "I think, when you do go to Suakin, I'll come with you, Bob," he said. "I'd enjoy that!"

They drank their coffee where they stood. Sarie sipped from her own cup, looking at them in turn before she asked, "Do you know much about this Ibn Abdallah?"

Cunningham shook his head. "No, but he may be after more than the Yezidee dervishes. You can never tell in times like these," he went on. "I've just got back from El Kantara. I'd been tightening up some patrols." He emptied his cup. "I expected to get some information down there from Curzon Lee, but it hadn't come through." Then he said, "I think I'll walk through the native quarter in the morning. I may pick up some news there."

"You'll only hear rumors." Kamil drained his cup, and asked, "What about this man in the lock-up?"

"We ought to get along. Are you coming, Larry?" Cunningham asked and, before Larrimore could answer, Sarie called, "Stay for another cup of coffee, Larry! I'd like to talk to someone for a little while."

Kamil reached for his *tarboosh* and bone-handled crop. "You won't worry over any of this?" he asked.

"No, I promise you," she answered.

"I haven't said anything, because I didn't want to alarm you." Cunningham put down his empty cup. "But now it's out, I think perhaps it's better you should know how things look, Sarie."

"Much better," she agreed, and added, "Thank you, Bob."

"I'll shave before you see me again!" he said.

She watched the two go across the tiled floor. One of the Sudanese appeared in the shadows beyond the doorway, leading the way out to the courtyard.

SARIE reached for Larrimore's cup and filled it again.

"Shall we go back to the Divan?" she asked. "I'd like to dance, and forget all this. Unless you have work you must do tomorrow? It's very late!"

"Let's go back for an hour," he suggested.

She took a little coffee, then sat gazing toward the doorway through which the others had gone. Suddenly, she said, "When we lived at Assuan, after we left Suakin, we had two Yezidee servants in the family. We didn't know what they were." She looked at him. "They taught me to dance."

He said nothing, but waited for her to go on. "They taught me secretly because, even then, I believe they knew what they intended to do with me later on."

"I think you love dancing," he said slowly.

She was not listening. "They taught me their fire dance," she told him. "But only the movements, not its meaning." He realized that, for all her apparent calm, emotion was strong within her, and he knew that she was talking to ease her feelings. He listened quietly, and she said, "The Yezidees believe that, when the world ends, all their enemies will be thrown into a hell dragged up from the bottom-most pit, and that Shaitan's wife will dance on its gates!"

She held her cup in both hands, and her fingers made slender shadows across its glistening silver. "They would have made me dance it for them in the tower

that Bob smashed." Then she asked suddenly, "Do you suppose he's in love with Ann Somerset?"

She had a way of asking surprising questions, putting them without any warning. He stared for a moment. "I hardly think he knows her," he answered.

"I've seen them together, several times," she said.

He wondered why she had asked about Ann, who worked with him at the native hospital and who, like himself, was waiting in Port Said for some sort of official appointment to somewhere in the Pacific. She had trained at Johns Hopkins, and had spent some time at the Barraquer clinic, in Barcelona, then she had made a round-about trip through England to Russia. After that, she had come down across the Levant to study the effect of dryness and sand on the eyes of troops in Egypt. She had done all of this because she intended to specialize in ophthalmic surgery.

Talking of Ann Somerset, Larrimore was ready to admit that she was a remarkable girl; privately, he regarded her as just a little too efficient, but quite charming for anyone who liked blue eyes, nut-brown hair and a Boston accent.

Sarie said, "Bob doesn't come to the hospital just to see you!" She was smiling, and Larrimore sat up a little. He could not understand why Sarie should ask about Ann, unless she herself were interested in Cunningham.

While he still stared, she clapped her hands and the *fellahin* girl appeared at once. "My cloak," Sarie said, then clapped again and the Sudanese appeared in the doorway. "The carriage, Hoseyin," she called. She stood up, said abruptly, "We'll go and dance now Larry. I intend to forget everything and be happy for an hour."

Larrimore rose with her, laughed at the sudden change of mood and took the cloak from the girl.

The other Sudanese house-boy was holding open the door to the courtyard, and Sarie stopped short when they stepped out to the darkness. Four of Kamil's policemen were carrying away the dead dervish, and they had covered him completely with strips of blue cloth, as a precaution against evil.

The men checked as Sarie appeared, then they went on, moving out of the courtyard and past the carriage which waited on the road. She looked at the two watchmen who were standing by, and asked quietly, "Who guarded my house so well?"

One indicated his companion. "Musah?" she asked. "It was you?" The man nodded, and she opened her bag. "Pay them to make prayers for you at the mosque," she said.

She offered coins, but the man did not attempt to take them because they were tainted by her touch. After a moment, she smiled and turned to where a hollowed stone, filled with water, stood near the doorway. She dropped the coins into it, then moved on with Larrimore. Both the Nubians drew aside as she passed, so that even her skirt would not reach them.

The guards by the coach salaamed while Larrimore helped her in, and he looked back as he followed.

Musah was dipping into the stone bowl and taking out the coins because, now, the water had made them clean.

CHAPTER IV

FORGER OF SWORDS

AS HE had said that he would do, Cunningham went into the native quarter next morning. He learned nothing about the desert prophet until he came to the market place.

Shaggy gray Egyptian vultures sat in a row along a wall at one side. They were gorged, humped on their pink legs; above them, excited in the air, wheeled kites and gulls and hooded crows, attracted by a small abattoir hidden behind the wall.

The native market was full of milling life and dusty color. Sharp-eyed Arabs and *fellahin* and half-naked Somalis moved among tethered goats, crated hens, stalls and sandal-makers. Knives flashed where men trimmed the ribs of long palm leaves, or cut purple-jointed sugar cane, and a smith was working in the shade of a thick-foliaged lebbek tree. A crowd had gathered here, not

"It is a sword for killing Yezidees, **effendi,"** *the smith said.*

so much because the man was making a sword, but because Bob Cunningham had stopped to watch him.

For two hours Cunningham had wandered through the native quarter, seeking news of Ibn Abdallah. Everyone knew about the prophet with the shaven skull. Local Arabs and traders in from Sinai, fishermen from Lake Menzala spoke of him with peculiar respect, but they had no real information. They had only rumors that he was a worker of miracles and a healer, and they said that he could travel a thousand miles between sun and sun. Cunningham had heard similar stories of other desert prophets.

He had tilted his pith helmet to shield the back of his neck against the stark morning sunshine, and he looked trim in a khaki bush shirt and shorts, big against the lean, thin-shanked natives. Abdi the cripple was near him, leaning on his crutch, wearing a clean *zaboot.*

The smith lifted the tempered, unpolished sword that he had made and brought the flat of it down on a hardwood block. He turned the blade over and hit with the other side, striking powerfully to test his work; each time, the sword rang like a bell.

It was the shape of the weapon which had caught Cunningham's attention, although it was startling enough to find such a man making a sword at all. He was an Arab, with a singed cloth about his waist; he had a sun-dried, sinewy, hairless body and his parched skin formed a mass of wrinkles about his ears and over his forehead.

Usually he wrought lamp-holders, or

made iron tires for cartwheels, or shod horses, but it was evident that he had the knack of sword-making. His eyes had a monkey-like concentration as he hit with the back of the sword, then struck with the edge. The steel, although it was as yet unsharpened, bit deeply and he had to hold the block down with one horny foot before he could wrench the weapon clear. Cunningham reached for it then.

The blade was gently curved, broadening all the way to the tip. The hilt was formed from the steel itself, with the pommel hammered around to form a hook which fitted neatly against the edge of Cunningham's palm. The metal had, in all probability, come from a junked automobile, and the design was altogether unusual; it was a surprising thing to come from the hands of a man who worked under a lebbek tree, with only rough tools and no more than a stone hearth.

The man said, "It is a sword for killing Yezidees, *effendi.*"

Cunningham knew that the native quarter was in uneasy expectation that more dervishes would follow the two who had been caught in the town; it was not surprising that, here and there, a man should be contriving some weapon against them. But he looked up sharply as the smith added, "By the word of the new prophet, *effendi,* that is the shape such a sword must be!"

The Arab smiled uneasily under Cunningham's glance, then moved a goatskin which lay at the foot of the tree. The sand beneath had been wetted, pressed down, and a pattern for the weapon had been drawn on the smoothed surface. It had been made by a *marabout,* the smith said; a ragged, wandering holy man who had come out of Arabia and had now gone on.

"He carries the voice of Ibn Abdallah," the Arab continued, and set the stiff goatskin carefully into place again. "I make the sword for any man who will buy."

He became still, waiting. The crowd around watched Cunningham silently as he turned the sword over in his hands, then tried its balance.

He realized that it must have been the visiting *marabout* who had spread local tidings of Ibn Abdallah. This weapon, no doubt, was a practical representation of the sword of Islam, which the desert prophet would call on the faithful to bear against the Yezidee worshippers of Shaitan.

It was a real sword, instead of a fabled one, and suggested that something deep and powerful might be stirring, if the sword of a newly risen prophet in Arabia could set men to making weapons here in Egypt. Sight of it helped Cunningham to the decision that it was growing urgent to learn where Ibn Abdallah might be, and to check him.

Again, he studied the curious design of the sword. He remembered that Prince Mikki collected Arab weapons; possibly he would know whether its shape had any significance, or Sarie might have seen something like it.

"I will buy this," he told the smith, and the man said eagerly, "Then, first, I should make it very sharp and clean, *effendi!*"

"There's no need." Cunningham reached into a pocket for coins, spilling a mixture of English silver and Egyptian piastres into the man's palms as he cupped them.

Intentionally, Cunningham paid the man more than well before he stepped to the goatskin and kicked it aside. He rubbed his foot across the markings on the sand, wiping them out. He did not want weapons like these anywhere near Sarie.

"Make no more swords!" he said, and walked quickly from the market-place.

Cunningham went along a narrow street of flat-roofed, tumbledown shacks. Some were surrounded by sand-filled boxes and sacks, set as a guard against the bombs which, every little while, fell on Port Said. It was not possible to dig shelters because, after a few feet, water seeped up through the sand. Even the dead in the cemeteries were placed above ground.

Abdi limped level with Cunningham, who let him carry the sword. Abdi had been made lame as a boy and it was, he said, through the curse of the keeper

of a mosque, whom he had gravely offended and who had struck him with a copy of the Koran. He had fallen, finding himself lame when he tried to get up, and he would never permit his leg to be examined.

His hair was clipped back to a level with his ears, making a line across the top of his head and giving him a very high, glistening, coppery brow. His eyes, habitually screwed up against the sun, peered out of slits so that he looked very crafty. He missed little of what went on, and he had served Cunningham for seven years. They never talked much together, but Cunningham treated him like a man and cherished him when he was sick, which made a bond between them.

Abdi looked the blackened sword over as he hitched himself along, then, from Cunningham's heels, he called, "*Effendi,* no man here knows of Ibn Abdallah. But men in Suez would know!"

He was right. Arab *dhows* came into the port at the other end of the canal, bringing native passengers from places all along the Red Sea. Such men would be aware of what was happening in the deserts, and where the prophet was to be found.

If he was like other prophets who had arisen in the past, instead of traveling a thousand miles between sunrises he would tend to remain a long time in one place, exhausting local bounty and outstaying his welcome.

"I have no time to go to Suez," Cunningham said.

"*Effendi,* I would go!"

Cunningham smiled. He had guessed that offer would come. It was only a few hours' journey by train to Suez and, in two or three days, Abdi would absorb all the news there was in the port. He had done that sort of thing in the past, making lonely desert journeys. The fact that he was a cripple made men kind to him, and Abdi traded on that.

"I have a friend who is as a brother to me, *effendi,*" Abdi added. "I would leave him to guard your back while I am gone."

He received no answer, and Abdi said nothing more; he knew that Cunningham would think about it.

They crossed the Shari Nabeeh, at one end of which Lake Menzala lay. Fishing boats were moored to the little quay, their masts slanting against the smooth, glinting water. In the distance, reed-grown sandspits made narrow slivers of green.

The little shacks now gave place to storied buildings. Here and there were patches of plastered housewall which showed yellow or rose-colored against the oyster-gray of sunbleached wood. Chickens scoured the dusty road, and natives were crowded to the shadow at one side of the hot street. Men cried greetings from dark doorways, or from where they sat in the shadows and, all the way, Cunningham grunted in answer. Abdi used the sword to threaten children who would have followed them, begging pennies.

Cunningham considered the question of sending Abdi to Suez. Any day, now, information should come in from Curzon Lee, a man who had been sent into the deserts some time before and whose return was now overdue, but it might be as well to use Abdi. Once the approximate location of Ibn Abdallah had been determined, a desert patrol could pick him up and bring him to order before his influence became too great.

It would be almost a matter of routine, unless the desert prophet proved exceptional. Cunningham did not anticipate that but, at the back of his mind, he did not like the unusual circumstances of the sword. He stopped suddenly and turned, taking the weapon.

"Tweedie *effendi* will give you money," he said abruptly. "Go to Suez, Abdi. Go now!"

Abdi said eagerly, "I will send my friend. He will show you the marks that a leopard made, then you will know him, *effendi.*"

Cunningham nodded, and Abdi said, "*Allah yisallimak.* . . . Allah guard thee!" and Cunningham answered in the Moslem way, "Go with safety, O Abdi!"

The man scurried forward, dust spurting from the tip of his crutch as it skimmed the road. He darted between two buildings and disappeared. Cunningham continued along the street and now, as he drew near the edge of the native quarter, he could see the barrage

balloons beyond buildings ahead; they hung glistening and still, protecting the quays and oil stores and dumps about the harbor.

Suddenly, he saw Ann Somerset appear on a corner a little distance away. She waved, smiling toward him while he checked in surprise, then he tucked the blunt sword under his arm and quickened his pace.

ANN SOMERSET wore a white smock and a white headdress, and behind her was a white-painted station wagon which Larrimore had bought, converting it to an ambulance. Its doors bore the legend, *Native General Hospital—Port Said,* and in a panel beneath this were beautifully drawn Arabic characters which said the same thing.

The ambulance had been backed under the sagging balcony of a dilapidated house and slack-robed children stood around, with women whose black eyes seemed very big above the edges of their face-veils. The women always came out to stare at Ann when she appeared in the native quarter.

White went with her warm tan, but she could wear colors very well; only they had to be soft and deep, not the bright tones which suited Sarie. Her features were in keeping with the personality which had brought her from Massachusetts to France and on to Egypt; like Larrimore, she had simply attached herself to the little native hospital, finding plenty of scope for practical work.

Her nose was straight and not small, neither were her ears small; it was her smile, her reality, which gave her charm, and under her gentleness there was very considerable drive. The natives liked her because she treated them as humans, and with sympathy.

"Picking up a case?" Cunningham asked as he came up.

"It's a beautiful irido-cyclitis," and she chuckled because she knew he would not understand what that meant.

He laughed with her, and when Cunningham laughed it was in the richly silent way he had caught from desert Arabs. "Is Larry here?" he asked, because he did not like her to be alone in the native quarter.

"He's in the house," she answered.

Cunningham took the salute of a mounted policeman who had pulled up by the ambulance, then he remained looking toward the house, apparently not giving any attention to Ann. His manner toward her was always casual, at first. Even on those occasional evenings when he stopped in at the hospital, it was only as a seeming afterthought that he asked her to dine.

Ann had discovered that his off-handedness camouflaged a fear that she might rebuff him and he was, she felt, surprisingly diffident for the "el-Cunningham" who was admired all over the Middle East. But, she realized, he could have had almost pathetically little experience with women; this, she knew, was a dangerous conclusion at which to arrive, but it gave her subtle pleasure.

In the minute that she had first met him, Ann had known that here was a man with whom she could fall in love. She understood why it was that, looking at him now, she saw little things which no one else would ever notice: the sun-wrinkles about his eyes, the stubby way his strong nose was rooted, the lean hardness of his cheeks.

She glanced at the sword and asked, "What's that?"

He drew it from under his arm. "I want to show this to Sarie," he said.

"Sarie?" She made her voice bright.

He explained about the weapon. "Sarie may have seen them before," he said, "or Prince Mikki might know the origin of the design." Then he asked suddenly, "This irido thing . . . not contagious, is it?"

"It's a penetrating wound in an eye," she answered. "A boy fell off the roof here, and he broke some ribs as well."

He nodded, watching her lips, waiting for her to go on. He liked simply to listen to her voice; he found it very clear, and full of drawled little intonations, very different from the high voices of Englishwomen.

"Larry's fixing him up so that we can move him," she said, and Larrimore emerged from the house then, carrying an emergency bag.

HE WORE a sun helmet, short-sleeved shirt and white pants. Two hospital orderlies, carrying a stretcher, came behind him; they wore suits of white duck and red *tarbooshes*, uniforms which Larrimore had provided. He had financed a good deal of efficient reorganization at the rough little native hospital, to the delight of the Egyptian doctor in charge and to whom Ann's advent was almost as great a boon. He often wondered why two Americans should choose to work there without pay, and risk their health in the native quarter; it was something he could not understand.

A boy lay on the stretcher. There was a heavy black bandage over his eyes and under this showed the edges of soft lint, very clean against his dusty, kinky hair and bronze skin. Ann went quickly to him, and Larrimore smiled cheerfully toward Cunningham.

"The more I see of this place, the more it gets to be a medical museum," he said enthusiastically. He pointed to a figure already on the ambulance. "I've an elephantoid fever there!"

Ann was bending over the boy, raising his head and adjusting the rest under it. The orderlies slid the stretcher onto the ambulance, then climbed in after it. Turning away, she saw the boy's distressed family peering after him from the darkness of the house doorway. She heard a woman weeping, and knew suddenly that native families are like families anywhere in the world.

"Bob, I wonder if you'd tell his folks that the boy will be all right," she said. "My Arabic's not good enough yet."

Cunningham nodded and moved toward the doorway, but he stopped short as Larrimore added, "And you might warn them that he'll have only one eye when he comes home."

"One eye?" Cunningham stared, and Ann began, "You see, there's sympathetic ophthalmatitis," then she caught herself up and explained, "There's a sort of sympathetic inflammation of the other eye. I can't save it unless I remove the bad one."

"If you do that, nobody will go near him," Cunningham said abruptly. "One-eyed people are outcasts. He'll just starve to death!" He added, "Even his own family will turn him out."

Larrimore looked blankly at Ann. She regarded Cunningham for a moment, then said simply, "Well, suppose I fix him up with a glass eye?"

Cunningham stared. "Could you do that?"

"We'll get one from somewhere," she answered.

Cunningham began to laugh. "He'll be about the only Arab in Egypt with a glass eye." He stood chuckling. "He'll be able to make a living just letting people see him take it out and put it back again."

She laughed with him, and Larrimore said, "Then we'll be doing the kid a good turn." He added, "Come on! We've a lot to do. See you later, Bob!"

They moved toward the ambulance, and Ann slipped onto the seat beside him. As Larrimore sent the vehicle slowly away over the rough road, she leaned out to call, "Give my love to Sarie, Bob!"

When the ambulance turned the corner onto a street which ran directly toward the town, Ann saw that Cunningham was still gazing after them. She waved to him. Larrimore was smiling as she faced ahead again.

"Swell fellow, Bob," he commented, and she watched him for a little space before she asked frankly, "Is he very interested in Sarie?"

Larrimore grunted, "I hope not," then looked into the back of the ambulance. One of the orderlies was holding a blanket so that the strong sunlight, striking from one side, could not reach the boy. The elephantiasis case lay heavily lax and still on a lower rack; this was a disorder for which no altogether satisfactory treatment had ever been found, and Larrimore was looking forward to some interesting experimental work.

He discovered that Ann was still watching him and he said, "Tweedie figures that, when the war's over, they'll make Bob governor of Sinai, or somewhere. I don't think Sarie would care about being governor's lady, in some lousy desert."

"You never can tell," Ann said softly.

"You never can tell with a woman," he agreed. "I mean, when you first got

here, all you wanted was to be a specialist in ophthalmic surgery!"

She said, "I still do!"

"But not quite so much, eh?" And then, steering to dodge potholes, he added, "I think maybe you wouldn't mind somewhere like Sinai!"

Ann did not answer. He realized that, perhaps, he had been a little too assuming and he glanced at her again, prepared to apologize. She was smiling, gazing straight ahead.

"That doesn't altogether rest with me," she said, then looked at him as she asked cheerfully, "But it wouldn't be troubling you, would it, to keep Sarie occupied as much as possible?"

CHAPTER V

QUEEN ZAHRA-KHETA AND KING QUALOON

NATIVES ran off the roadway when they saw Sarie's carriage. Women slipped behind the pillars of sidewalk arcades and children, warned against her, dodged into doorways or around corners, putting their hands over their faces, peering out between their fingers as the carriage passed. A scowling, green-turbanned pilgrim, newly home from Mecca, raised a bony arm and called after her, "May Allah blacken thy face, O *Shaitan sitt!*"

"That's the one thing I really dislike," Sarie said evenly, "being shouted at in the street."

"I'm afraid they've been stirred up by those two Yezidees," Cunningham answered. "I'm sorry."

"Well," and she glanced at him, "I don't mind it so much when I'm with you."

He sat with the sword between his knees; when he had stopped by her house to show the weapon, she had offered him a lift into the town. Often, in the mornings, Sarie went shopping; she bought things that she did not need, but it helped to pass the day.

She wore a cool yellow frock, and a soft-brimmed hat shaded her face. She used no kohl to stress the distinctive shape of her eyes, and there was nothing Egyptian about her now, except that her delicate hands and the smallness of her feet were typical of a people who had preserved their line from the Pharaohs. She might have been French, but for the richness of her coloring and her very graceful slenderness; she showed that true Egyptians were a Celtic race, and had nothing in common with negroes, or even with Arabs.

Cunningham went on, "Apparently, those dervishes came across the lake. I'm going out with Kamil to set some new patrols." He added, "We'll see that it doesn't happen again!"

"Thank you," she said, and put her hand on his arm for a moment, smiling because she always felt protected in his presence and could appreciate his strength.

The contact of her fingers stirred him and he looked at her, realizing the softness of her smiling lips and how deep her eyes appeared behind their thick lashes. He said, "We'll get after the patrols this morning, only I want to see Prince Mikki first."

"If I may, I'll come with you," she answered. "I'd like to hear what he has to say about it."

"Of course," he agreed.

She called a direction to the driver, who turned the carriage along narrow ways onto a thoroughfare which had once been called the Rue du Nil, and which sliced across Port Said's tangled life. Arab women minced along the sidewalks in high-heeled shoes, and slick Levantine traders lounged between hotel bars. There were *tarbooshed* peddlers and scented negresses and Hindus who wore silk turbans above their business suits. Allied soldiers and British naval ratings and Abyssinians with boots on sockless feet; Maltese clerks and jackal-like shoeshine boys, lascars and brash Syrians and remarkably dressed dancers from the hotel cabarets.

The high sun cast deep shadows from awnings that were maroon and blue and orange, and along the roadway men walked with their own shadows moving about their feet. The street quieted only as the carriage neared the Suez Hotel, which overlooked the beach. Neat fan palms grew by the entrance, their trunks shining red and their wonderful leaves

tipped with silvery fiber. Bougainvillea blooms made drooping clusters of purple against the hotel walls, which rose on three sides about a tiled courtyard.

Colored umbrellas shaded iron tables and heavy cane chairs, and Prince Mikki was seated here, drinking his morning coffee. He was shaved and fresh from his bath, faintly perfumed, very smart in his dark blue uniform.

CUNNINGHAM had known just where Mikki could be found, because he rarely varied his idle days. As a military attaché, his function was to see a good deal more than he was supposed to see, but he never tried to see anything. He displayed no interest in the number and type of planes at the flying fields of Ismailia, or in Libya; he was not interested in how many tanks or what guns and war material came off ships docking in Suez. He sent no reports on these things to Ankara; Cunningham would have known had he attempted it.

Cunningham did not like this man whose Turkish blood had both Arab and negro strains. He did not like his nature, nor the feeling he had that Mikki was waiting for something. Cunningham could not guess what it might be.

Now, crossing the couryard with Sarie, he saw Prince Mikki reach for his cap, its star and crescent glinting as he put it on and came forward. He donned his cap only so that he could give Sarie a little salute; it was an imitation of the easy, courteous gesture with the half-bent hand which a British officer gives to a lady.

"This is unexpected!" He was welcoming, smiling. "Join me for coffee, won't you?"

"Thank you," Sarie said and, attentively, he drew out a chair for her.

"I won't stay," Cunningham told him. "Kamil is waiting for me." He put the sword on the table as he said, "I looked in to ask if you'd ever seen anything like this."

Mikki frowned, staring at the weapon while he came from behind Sarie's chair. "Where did you get that?" he asked. Cunningham told him, and Mikki's frown made black lines between his thin brows while he listened thoughtfully.

"You collect old Arab swords," Sarie said. "Bob thought you might know if its shape means anything."

Mikki picked the weapon up. "This looks like a copy of an old mameluke sword." He turned it over in his hands as he added curiously, "They made them this shape, six or seven hundred years ago!"

"Apparently, native smiths are making them like that now," Cunningham commented and Mikki glanced at him. His stubby-lashed lids were half closed over his eyes, and his whole attention was subtly questioning.

"It's odd, if it's a mameluke design," Sarie said, and it was odd, because mamelukes were soldier slaves whom the Turks had trained and used to conquer Egypt; later, the slaves had usurped the position of their masters and had themselves ruled the country.

"I recognize the style of this, because I have an old mameluke sword that I picked up in Cairo." Mikki gripped the hilt, trying the balance of the weapon, cutting the air with it and using it like a saber. He added, "I sent it home to Ankara, tc the rest of my collection."

Cunningham watched him for a moment, then said, "The shape's unusual. Is there any particular significance about that?"

"No." Mikki shook his head. "Only I'd stop the natives making any more of these if I were you!" He half glanced toward Sarie. "Especially near here," he added significantly.

"They won't make any more. I'll see to that!" Cunningham answered abruptly.

Sarie sat looking up at them. She caught the meaning behind Prince Mikki's words, but her expression did not change. He put the sword down as a waiter brought fresh cups, and spoke on while he poured coffee for her.

"If you were to put an edge on that sword, Cunningham," he said, "it would shear through almost anything. That heavy tip is very well contrived, and the pommel hook makes a secure grip." He added, "It's a strong, balanced weapon intended for close fighting, but there's nothing more to it than that."

Cunningham nodded slowly. If the new prophet intended to arm his followers, he would choose a sword of this sort, because its design was simple and effective. He picked it up, watching while Mikki passed a cup to Sarie. Then he suddenly asked, "Why do you collect old weapons?"

"It's something to do!" Mikki's smile showed his square, even teeth. "It's probably my ancestry which makes me interested in such things." He picked up the cup which he had filled for himself and said shortly, "I'm sorry I can't help you any further, Cunningham."

There was obvious dismissal in his tone. Cunningham had noticed that Prince Mikki never missed an opportunity of trying to make him feel inferior; that came either from a sense of insecurity, or else it merely arose from his natural arrogance. Just now, Cunningham decided, it was shaded by a desire to show off before Sarie, but that did not trouble him.

He said, "Thank you, anyhow," and slipped the sword under his arm. "And thank you for the lift, Sarie."

"If you're going to Kamil's office, use my carriage," she suggested.

"I'll send it straight back." He held her smiling gaze for a moment then started away across the court. "Goodbye, Bob. . . !" she called after him, and watched until the carriage moved off.

SARIE'S two Nubian guards remained squatting just inside the entrance, where fan palms threw shade. When she turned around, she found that Prince Mikki was regarding her with a very level gaze.

"That sword is a dangerous thing," he said. "A few of those, and a little drink, would be enough to bring Arabs out of the native quarter, looking for you."

"I don't think there's any real risk of that," she answered.

"But other smiths could be making other swords," he said.

"Bob will stop them," she replied confidently. "He'll send police out, and they'll give orders everywhere." She laughed a little, then saw something in his expression which made her ask suddenly, "You weren't holding anything back about it just now, were you?"

He looked at her reflectively over his cup and she waited, regarding him thoughtfully, because she sensed things about him which even Cunningham could not appreciate. She was herself an exile, and she could recognize a similar quality in Prince Mikki. Intuitively, she knew that he was a dangerous man, but that was part of his charm.

She bent toward him, and asked quietly, "It didn't mean anything, did it?"

"No," he said, "except that my own ancestors used swords just like that one." He went on, "You see, one side of my family goes back to Qualoon, who was king of Egypt over six centuries ago." He set down his cup as he said, "It shocked me a little to think that you should be threatened by such a weapon because, when your family named you, they remembered that you come from a line of Egyptian queens!"

She wondered how he knew that, and forgot her coffee as she sat watching him.

" 'Sarie' is a diminutive," he said. "They named you Zahra-Kheta." He added, " 'Zahra' means 'flower.' And you know how they arrived at 'Kheta?' "

She did know, but she made no reply. She wanted to hear what he would say.

"Kheta was the family name of the princess who married Rameses the Second," he said. "The Rameses whom they called 'the splendid Pharaoh!' "

He was smiling and he put his peaked cap aside, so that his eyes were no longer shadowed. Then she saw that his gaze was intent, even though his attitude appeared careless. She asked, "How did you know about that?"

"I was interested." He nodded, smiling still. "Very interested, Princess Zahra-Kheta!"

She said quickly, "I don't think anyone would admit that title for me!"

"But it suits you!" He put his arms on the table and leaned toward her, and his voice was low as he asked, "You've never daydreamed about what it would be like to be Queen of Egypt?" He chuckled and said, "You have, haven't you! On some evenings I've seen you looking as though you might be Rameses' queen, come to life again!"

"And you?" She asked, in the sudden

way she had, "Haven't you imagined yourself another Qualoon, King of Egypt again?"

He sat back, laughing softly. "That would be something," he said, "if you were my queen!"

The light, catching his eyes, found reddish glints in them and they remained contemplative for all his laughter.

"Queer, isn't it?" he asked. "Like meeting across the centuries!" Then he commented, "A king, and a queen."

He held her gaze while he still laughed quietly, his head tilted as he regarded her and said, "Well, strange things have come out of great wars!"

Those words stayed in her mind. They talked about other things until her carriage returned and he handed her into it. She rode toward the town and, all the time, she thought of his words and knew that he meant her to think of them.

She wondered if this descendant of El-Mansour Qualoon hoped that great armies would cut their way out of the west into Egypt, and come smashing down from the north, driving on Port Said and the canal.

Perhaps he waited for them to come, dreaming that they would somehow lift him to kingship of Egypt; but, even while she considered it, Sarie knew that it was an impossible thing. It was not for this that he waited, but for something else.

Sarie had her own dreams, and he was clever to have guessed at them. Secretly, and very privately, she did think of herself as Princess Zahra-Kheta and this, she knew quite well, was why she liked to dress as she did in the evenings. It was a romantic thing to do and, for a little while, it lifted her out of the ugliness by which she found herself surrounded.

Her dreams were without any real desire, but she could see that Prince Mikki's imaginings were not so harmless. Something implacable about him suggested that he was a man who would, if he could, shape his dreams to reality as his mameluke forefathers had done, using the modern equivalent of a sword.

Only, it seemed, Prince Mikki had no sword.

CHAPTER VI

"AND SHE SHALL DIE WITH THEM"

A SMALL caravan plodded along beside the Suez canal. With the lead camel was a wily-eyed old Arab who had a spring of thyme stuck into the red band about the hood of his burnoose.

He was a trader in spices. The sewn bundles and baskets on his camels contained the product of half a year's travel: balsam and dried catha leaves, myrrh and cardamom seeds, fennel and marjoram and cummin. His two wives followed, one driving a pair of laden asses and the other urging three goats along.

By the last camel was an African negro. He wore a green turban, bleached from the sun, and a brown cloth draped his shoulders, half hiding a pair of ragged shorts. He had bulb-shaped nostrils and thin-lidded eyes and his hair was close. Fine sand adhered to his sweating face and chest, and he was small-built, tired. The only unusual thing about him was his forehead; his brow had not been rounded off but was squared to temples so that, for all his pouting lips and long arms and thick jaw, he had intelligence. He looked ahead to the scorched buildings of Port Said. He had the satisfied expression of a man who nears a journey's ending, and he reached out to stroke the camel beside him.

The animal thrust its head forward, closing its huge eyes, and blowing softly through its nostrils as the negro caressed its ears, then moved to overtake the Arab. He closed up slowly and the caravan was near the railroad depot when he called, "Now we part, good friend!" His voice was clear, and his Arabic was that of a town-bred man.

The camels checked. The Arab and the negro stood together, looking at the dumps in the depot yard, at the piles of material by the Old Arsenal Basin, at the heavy balloon barrage in the otherwise empty sky.

"Their war goes on," and the old Arab was pleased. "It makes profit for me!" His gray head wagged as he laughed to himself. "I sell my spices for three times their worth."

"Allah prospers the peaceful." Respectfully, the negro touched his fingers to lips and turban. "May Allah ever preserve thee."

"Thy company has been pleasant," the old man said, then salaamed in response and called to his lead camel, moving on.

The negro cried *"Allah yisallimak!"* to the women when they went by, then watched the caravan head for the native quarter. It was out of sight before he continued to the town, glancing about like one who was getting his bearings.

He went slowly along a side street which was crowded with hawkers and porters and men from the docks. Passing Moslems greeted him, because his turban showed that he had been to Mecca. He responded politely to their salutations, then walked down the Shari el-Tur, stopping at the yard behind the police building, halfway along the quiet street.

At one side were stables, and just beyond the gate was a temporary extension from the main offices. Near the doorway stood a water-filled *goulah*, shaded by grouped banana trees; their wind-fringed leaves drooped, and behind deep-red blooms showed young fruit, thin and unpromising. The negro stepped to the earthenware pot and dipped a hand inside, scooping up water, drinking noisily, sloppily, his glance going through the doorway.

"May Allah ever preserve thee," the negro said.

The room beyond had wooden benches, and police rifles were chained in a rack,

with steel helmets and service gas masks on hooks above. A policeman sprawled on one bench, his boots off and his tunic unbuttoned; he was clumsy, mustached, recruited from Alexandria, and when he saw the negro drinking he growled, "Thou misbegotten son of a dog. . . .!" but it was too much trouble to get up and drive him away.

The policeman's voice attracted the attention of a sergeant who sat at a little desk. He was from Sinai, an Arishi, with gray-green eyes and brown hair and a tight-skinned, foxy face given him by the mixed blood of Turks and Romans and Arabs, and strains from Napoleon's troops. He sat with recognition dawning in his eyes as he watched the negro straighten up, wiping away the water that spilled from lips and chin before he suddenly walked inside, going straight across the floor.

The policeman swung to his feet, reaching toward the negro. "Thou son of sixty dogs. . . !" he began, but the sergeant grabbed his arm. "*Shawaiya* . . . softly!" he muttered.

THE negro went on and entered an inner room which had a desk and some broken chairs and a telephone; there was nothing more except a plan of the town, pinned to one wall, and a large map which showed the country all across the Nile delta and as far south as the pyramids of Gizeh.

The sergeant followed to the doorway, standing quietly until the negro looked at him and asked, "El-Cunningham?" The sergeant saluted very smartly, and went quickly to the telephone. He called a number, then passed the receiver to the negro, who waited dumbly for the connection to be made.

His brown robe fell open, showing that he carried a goatskin pouch by a strap over one shoulder and an empty, dry water-bag. His legs and ankles were much scarred from rocks and thorns and he stood patiently, his wet lips flaccid, lax. The staring policeman moved up to the doorway, peering in until the sergeant urgently motioned him away.

There was a click in the receiver, then "Hello?" The negro's dull expression vanished, his lips tightened and his attitude changed completely. When he spoke, his voice was a shock; the harshness of his Arabic was replaced by tones which were cultured, modulated, entirely British, "To whom am I speaking?"

"This is Captain Tweedie."

"Is Mr. Cunningham with you?" the negro asked and Tweedie, impressed by the quality of the voice to which he was listening answered, "He is here, sir."

"This is Curzon Lee. I wonder if you would be kind enough to tell Mr. Cunningham that I'm coming around to his house immediately."

"I'll tell him, sir," Tweedie replied courteously. "The name, you said, is Curzon Lee?"

"Curzon Lee," the negro repeated. "Good-bye."

He replaced the receiver, nodded to the sergeant and went out past the troubled policeman, who had now buttoned his tunic although he still stood in his socks.

He paused by the *goulah* and drank again before he went on in the direction of the Shari Rameses, and Cunningham's house. All along the street he returned the greetings of Moslems, who regarded him as a member of their own faith; indeed he was, although he had been born in the parish of St. Mary-atte-Bow, not far from the river Thames.

He was the son of a Zanzibar negro, a ship's fireman who had settled in London to work for a coal merchant; his mother was a Bantu woman, nurse to a family which had brought her from Kenya. It was Curzon Lee's unusual cleverness, and the tolerance of the British, that had lifted him through scholarships to a university, where he had been accepted as a talented man, interesting because of his color.

All his life, Curzon Lee had been imbued with the idea of going to Africa and doing what he could to elevate men of his own race. But he found that he could not do much to help his fellows; they seemed incapable of response. He himself was exceptional because, by some chance, he was one of those lonely mutations by which the development of future generations is sometimes presaged.

He discovered that, in Africa, his color barred him from work in keeping with his ability. Without real resources, disappointed, a little bewildered, he had wandered for years, making relatively futile ethnological studies and recording dialects in the hope that they might have some scientific value.

He easily learned to live like a native, and he began to slip because he now had no ambition and nothing to which he could hold. He was like a lost man until, with the war, British officials found that he could move all over north African territory, regardless of disputed frontiers and fighting. His reports to Cairo were excellently done, and militarily useful until all natives were cleared out of all the war areas.

It was Bob Cunningham who, unable to leave Port Said, had asked that Curzon Lee might go into the deserts and investigate the new prophet who called himself Ibn Abdallah, Son of the Servant of Allah.

CUNNINGHAM sat staring when Tweedie relayed the negro's message. He was perched by an old tin trunk, on which he had set three glasses and a siphon of seltzer, and he held a bottle of Scotch. Kamil Bey was bolt upright on the hard divan, smart in a white uniform, altogether surprised as he asked, "He's coming now?"

"He's on his way," Tweedie answered, and Cunningham glanced at Kamil.

"He'll tell us all we want to know about Ibn Abdallah!" Then he added, "Only if I'd thought he was going to turn up, I wouldn't have let Abdi go down to Suez."

"He sounded important," said Tweedie, who knew nothing whatever about Curzon Lee. "Is he from Cairo?"

Cunningham laughed and, pouring Scotch, he warned Tweedie of what to expect when he did see the negro.

The high-ceilinged room, in which Cunningham slept, was very bleakly furnished. Tweedie, using the one-time harem above, had created a home for himself, with rugs on the floor and pictures of pretty ladies on the walls; but Cunningham had only some low, stool-like tables and a couple of wooden chairs, and a few books in a recess of the plastered walls. There was little else, except his guns and a cork-lined humidor which rested, with his pipes, by the telephone near the divan.

Not much light came through the jalousies now that the time was near to sunset but, beyond the curtain of hanging cords over the arched doorway, the courtyard was still very bright. The Sudanese watchman sat under the locust tree. He wore a tunic and shorts and a white turban, and with him was the man whom Abdi had left to guard Cunningham's back. His name was Omar and he was stocky, half Arab and half Nubian. To identify himself, he had shown the long weals which a leopard had scored across his right shoulder and down his arm.

The day's sun had baked the freshness out of Cunningham's khaki, reddening the tan on his arms, and his shoes were mired from walking on sandspits; he had been setting extra patrols on Lake Manzala, where men were still searching the islands for chance Yezidee dervishes.

This hour of the evening was one to which he always looked forward, when he could get back to the house. It was pleasant to relax over sundowners, and to talk. Usually Larrimore turned up but, apparently, he had been detained at the hospital by his elephantiasis case.

Cunningham squirted seltzer water; this, with the Scotch, was normally locked in the trunk, out of reach of the house-boys. "Curzon Lee's a very clever fellow," he told Tweedie. "You'll probably like him."

"I knew him in England," Kamil said. "He was at Oxford while I was there."

He had a tight little smile while he spoke. It made Tweedie ask, "You didn't think much of him?"

"I wouldn't trust him very far," Kamil answered.

"You don't like him!" Cunningham said flatly and stood up, passing the filled glasses. "He took honors at Oxford that you couldn't get!"

Kamil smiled a little, then raised his glass. "Cheer-oh!" he called.

Tweedie said, "Skin off your nose, blokes!" then they drank together.

Cunningham dropped on to the end of the divan, pushing aside the half-made sword which he had brought from the native quarter that morning. "Curzon Lee's had a bad time, one way and another." He looked at Tweedie. "I'm sorry for him, because he doesn't really fit in anywhere. And he's sunk quite a bit, now."

"When he came up here," Kamil said, "he looked to me as though he'd practically gone native!"

"He knew he was going into the desert and, out there, I wear a burnoose half the time," Cunningham protested. "You can't judge by that!"

"And he's turned Moslem," Kamil added slowly.

Tweedie stood watching Kamil's dark face as he went on, "I think Curzon Lee's breaking down, like they all do."

"Not him!" Cunningham was sure of that. "He's too good a man." He emptied his glass and sat peering into it, smiling. "I must have needed that!"

"Have another?" Tweedie asked.

"One's enough for me."

CUNNINGHAM put his glass aside, then went out to warn the watchman that the negro was coming. It was only a couple of minutes afterwards that the Sudanese yelled, "*Effendi!*" and Curzon Lee appeared in the archway, shuffling on sandalled feet. The hanging cords wiped dust from his shoulders as he entered, bringing the very breath of the deserts with him, dry and acrid.

Cunningham went quickly to meet him. "How are you?" They shook hands, the negro smiling as Cunningham patted his shoulder, welcoming him warmly, drawing him into the room.

"Glad to see you again," Kamil called, but he did not offer to shake hands.

"This is Captain Tweedie," Cunningham said.

"How d'you do?" Curzon Lee bowed faintly, and Tweedie required a moment to overcome his amazement at the negro's Oxford accent, then he asked hospitably, "Will you have a whiskey and soda?"

"He never touches it!" Cunningham answered. "Make some tea, Pat!" As Tweedie hurried out, he went on, "You've had a rough trip." He could see that Curzon Lee had thinned, and he appeared very tired. "Would you like to clean up a little?"

"No. I'll not be staying long," the negro answered.

"You relax a bit!" Cunningham patted his shoulder again because he knew, from experience, that the first instinct of a man who has been long away from civilization is to get off by himself again. He jerked a chair forward as he said, "I can put you up here, you know! There's no need to hurry away."

"If you don't mind," Curzon Lee answered quietly, "I should prefer to make my report, and go."

He seated himself with the hesitating awkwardness of a man grown unused to chairs while Cunningham stared at him, surprised at his tone and becoming aware of an odd diffidence in his manner.

After that first brief smile, he made no response to Cunningham's welcome, and Kamil's expression had grown curiously alert and speculative as he stood by, watching the man.

Curzon Lee lowered his water-bag to the floor, then opened the goatskin pouch. He drew out a small roll of soft leather, holding it between his hands as he glanced first at Kamil, then at Cunningham. He said slowly, "I found Ibn Abdallah at Sana, north of Aden."

"And where is he now?" Kamil swung a chair around, straddling it.

"I don't know," Curzon Lee answered. "The prophet is always moving. He rarely spends more than one night in a camp."

Cunningham would have preferred the negro to rest before he made any sort of report but, now that he had started, it was better to let the man go on. Also, Cunningham was a little puzzled by Kamil; he had often seen him at the police building, straddling a chair and questioning a native, quiet in his attitude and dangerous, trying to get at something. Cunningham never interfered then, and he remained watching now.

"What is Ibn Abdallah like?" Kamil asked. His eyes were narrowed, quizzing, but his tone was strangely polite.

"He's a big man, with a shaved head and a tremendous voice. He used to be a saddle-maker at Medina." The negro answered readily, and looked toward the window space, where jalousies made dark bars across the softened light of the sun. "And the prophet always speaks to his followers at sunset. He'll be talking now, as Mahomet once talked!"

Curzon Lee's astonishingly cultured tones had taken on more life, and some eagerness.

Kamil asked, very softly, studying the negro's face all the time, "What does the prophet talk about?"

"He speaks of kindliness and honesty and faith in Allah," Curzon Lee said, and looked at Cunningham. "To be in the desert, and to hear his great voice coming out of the shadows—that is very impressive!"

"He certainly seems to have impressed you," Cunningham commented, because this was not the tenor of the report he had expected to hear. He caught a quick, almost warning glance from Kamil, then the negro was talking again.

"The prophet has huge hands, just as Mahomet had large hands." He told Kamil, "There are many who say that he is Mahomet himself, returned to the world again!"

"And why do they think he has come?" the Egyptian asked quietly.

"To fight against the *Shaitan sitt!*"

Cunningham stiffened. Kamil caught his glance again, then reached to the divan, picking up the blackened sword.

"Have you seen any weapons like this about?"

"I've seen many."

"That shape?" Cunningham asked.

"That shape," Curzon Lee agreed, then added, "but they have always been new and sharp and shining!"

"And where do they come from?" Kamil put the question and the negro replied, very gently, "The prophet conjures them out of the desert sand."

CUNNINGHAM stared, not sure that he was serious, while Kamil bent over the back of his chair as he almost whispered, "You mean, this prophet works miracles?"

"Ibn Abdallah is no ordinary man," Curzon Lee replied. "He has unusual power."

"And the swords are for killing Yezidees"—Kamil was still half whispering—"when Ibn Abdallah gives the word?"

"The Yezidees bring evil to the world," the negro said.

"You don't believe that rot!" Cunningham exclaimed.

"It is not for me to question the teachings of the prophet," Curzon Lee answered, and only then did Cunningham realize that he had the set humility of a disciple, and that Kamil had been right about him.

He had been breaking down. He had long accepted a native way of life, and now his dulling intelligence had given way before the deep credulity which is inherent in every African negro. He believed that the saddle-maker from Medina was indeed another Mahomet.

"You're going back to Ibn Abdallah?" Kamil was asking.

"I would not have come here," and the negro looked at Cunningham, "but I wanted to discharge my last duty to you." He added, "And the prophet is not afraid for you to know all about him!"

He began to unroll the leather that he held, while Kamil eased from his chair and said softly, "Bob, I don't think we should let Mr. Curzon Lee hurry away, do you?"

(To be continued)

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GOLDEN SHOWDOWN

By SAMUEL W. TAYLOR

THE three of us were on the ranch-house porch, and I was helping Bettina and Abel Calhoon figure up a list of everybody who ought to be invited to their golden wedding shindig, when a jalopy came steaming and rattling around the yellow hill and stopped in the yard. A lean old fellow with gray hair and a sweeping mustache got out, and at first I thought he must be going to a rodeo or a parade, because he had a cartridge belt around his middle with an old Peacemaker in the holster.

"Hello," I said, stepping off the porch into the sunlight.

The old fellow peered at me closely.

ILLUSTRATED BY GEORGE WERT

He was dried-up and leathery, but his eyes were sharp. "I come on business," he said. "Where's Abe Calhoon?"

"I tend to the ranch business now," I said. "I'm Jake Kennedy."

"Jake Kennedy is dead long ago," he said. Then, "You must be his kid. Where's Abe Calhoon?"

It was a bit strange, being called my father's kid, when I'll never see sixty again.

Then I heard Abel Calhoon say, "Hello, Rusk."

And almost as an echo to that was a little gasp from Bettina, as she breathed, "Rusk MacLean."

Then for an instant I somehow did seem a kid. The sun was hot like it used to be fifty years ago, the sage valley just the same, the same cedar top-

Abel's old Peacemaker roared and the can hopped from the fence post.

ping the yellow hills; and Rusk MacLean, tall and lean as ever, with a six-gun at his middle. The feeling only lasted a moment, and then the throb of the mail plane overhead broke in.

"Hello, Abe," Rusk MacLean said. "I understand you tore down my house."

Abel Calhoon frowned, puzzled. He was shorter than MacLean, heavier, with

a fine old head distinguished by a strong nose and a pair of jutting eyebrows that now were snow-white.

"Your house?" he said.

"Yes—my house!"

"Oh!" Abel Calhoon said, remembering. "Yes, I guess I did tear your shack down, Rusk. I bought your place at a tax sale, after you'd left the country. That must be forty years ago, when they auctioned your land for taxes."

"You took my place over and tore down my house," old Rusk MacLean said. He pushed his leathery face forward. "Well, I'm back, and I'm moving onto my land, and I'm putting up a new shack. What are you goin' to do about it?"

Abel Calhoon was obviously a bit baffled. His white brows almost met over his nose as he studied the other old man. "Why—all right, Rusk," he said. "I've got plenty of land, if you need somewhere to live."

"I ain't asking for somewhere to live," Rusk MacLean said. "And I ain't taking just a piece big enough to put a shack on. I'm taking my land!" Then he stomped to his jalopy, got it going, and went back around the hill.

"What's the matter with the old fool?" I said.

"He ain't changed a bit. Rusk and me never did get along."

"But you ain't seen him in fifty years."

Abel Calhoon shrugged, as if fifty years made no difference at all, to two men who just didn't get along.

I said, "What part of the ranch used to be his outfit?"

"The basin over the hill."

"That's our best hay land. He's crazy." We were due to cut the first crop in a week or so.

"Abel," Bettina said, "we don't want trouble with Rusk MacLean."

"I'm not asking for it," Abel said.

We went back on the porch and continued figuring up names of everybody to invite for the golden wedding.

OCCASIONALLY during the next few days we would hear the wheeze and whine of an accordion drifting over the hill, if the wind was right. Rusk MacLean still played the instrument, and somehow, hearing bits of that wail come with the wind, I kept remembering until it almost seemed time had turned back fifty years.

On Saturday Abel and I drove to town for supplies. We saw Rusk MacLean's jalopy parked in the street, and he was in the store when we went in. He still was wearing the belt and Peacemaker. I imagine this had attracted some attention, though there's no law in Nevada against a man carrying a gun, if it isn't concealed. Rusk gave a brief nod to Abel, who returned it. We'd about got our list filled, when Abel Calhoon said to Walt Hager, who runs the store: "Oh, yes—and I need a mower pitman."

"Sure. Cuttin' hay a'ready?"

"I'll start a week from Monday."

Rusk spoke up, in a soft drawl that somehow wasn't so soft: "You don't figure to cut my hay, Abe?"

"I'll start on the basin, if that's what you mean," Abel Calhoon said. He was ordinarily an easy-going man, but stubborn if you tried to push him.

"I wouldn't try that," Rusk MacLean said. "That's my hay."

There were a dozen people in the store, Saturday afternoon. They weren't missing any of this. And again for an instant I forgot these two men had gray hair and wrinkles, and that in the car we'd made the run to town in a few minutes, where it used to be a half-day trip.

This store hadn't changed so much. It still carried about everything people would need to wear and eat and keep up their equipment. There were horse collars and yellow collar pads hanging from the rafters, overalls piled on the counter, dry goods and groceries on the shelves. Now the nail kegs were in a circle around an oil burner instead of the old pot-bellied stove, and you got crackers in cartons instead of out of a barrel. The road through town was paved, and there was a beauty parlor and a service station now; but still things were the same somehow as when I was a kid and the valley was too small to hold both Rusk MacLean and Abel Calhoon.

"I'll cut my hay," Abel Calhoon was saying, and nothing had changed be-

tween him and Rusk MacLean in the fifty years. The two of them had seemed so great and strong to me in those days. Rusk MacLean, tall and lean, with black hair and the sweeping silky mustache; a wild sort, handsome, with white teeth that flashed in a bronzed face. A wizard with a gun, he'd been, back when that counted. You didn't see the lightning movement of his long right hand. The revolver just somehow seemed to leap into it, spitting. He used to like to show off his skill, and with strangers he would make a bet. He would stand with a silver dollar on the back of his right hand, extended shoulder high. Then he would let the dollar fall as he grabbed for his gun and emptied it at a row of beer bottles thirty yards away. The bet was that he could break three bottles before the dollar hit the ground. His single-action gun had no trigger; he worked the hammer with his thumb. And if the bottles were empty, he generally broke all six. If they were full, he might miss a couple because he'd shoot at the necks and drink the beer after collecting the bet. As a kid, I'd seen him win that bet several times, and in those days I would have given my left arm to be like him, even though he'd killed a couple of men —in self-defense, of course, as it used to be called when you shot a man who started to pull a gun on you. Of course nobody had a chance, trying to pull a gun on Rusk MacLean. Anybody should know that, even if he did accuse you of palming an ace, which was how the first killing happened. That caused some feeling, because the man had been drunk at the time and in no condition to pull a gun on anybody. The only feeling about the second killing was a sort of home-town pride. It was a mere contest of skill. A Texas gunman had heard about Rusk MacLean, and he made the trip just to see who was the better man. Everything was formal, like any other duel. When Rusk MacLean killed this gunman, the home folks knew he *was* good.

NOW, Abel Calhoon was about the same age, and like every young fellow at that time he wanted to be good with a revolver. And he was both a dead shot and fast getting into action. There were always shooting contests on the Fourth of July, and in everything it always seemed Abel Calhoon would be impossible to beat, until Rusk MacLean took his turn. It seemed that Rusk always came first, and Abel always second.

There was a rivalry between the two, in horses and saddles and everything. Abel practiced a lot of Rusk's trick with the silver dollar and the beer bottles, but Abel couldn't get out his gun and shoot more than two or three times before the dollar hit the dust, no matter how much he practiced. He just didn't have the reflexes. Practice won't improve any man beyond how his nerves and muscles are naturally tuned. Abel was just a split-second slower, and he never hit more than two bottles, even though he shot at the body instead of the neck.

Maybe because Rusk played the accordion, Abel played the fiddle; and while there was no measurement to compare them, there, people were inclined to say that Rusk sure could make that accordion talk. It seemed that people always were comparing them, as if waiting for the time they would come to grips in some struggle. It was obvious they didn't like one another; but they each respected the other, and they were very careful in each other's presence, like a couple of stiff strange dogs each waiting for the other to growl.

When Bettina Bagley moved into the county, and they both began courting the blue-eyed beauty, people were wont to say casually—too casually: "Well, I wonder how it'll turn out between those two?"

I was there at the schoolhouse dance the night of the blow-off. People danced in the one room, and us kids would chase outside, or else hang around the other room, waiting for a chance to steal a leg of chicken or some cake from the long table the old women fixed for the midnight meal.

I was outside when the thing happened; and through the years there are a number of versions of anything like that. But in the main the details are agreed upon. Both Abel and Rusk went

to claim Bettina for the same dance. Some say Rusk knew it was Abel's dance, and was just trying to freeze him out. Some say it was just a misunderstanding. In fifty years I never heard Abel Calhoon say anything one way or the other.

Maybe they both knew something like this would come. They didn't raise their voices. They said a few low words and started to fight. It was lucky nobody wore guns to the dance. Some say Abel was lucky, that Rusk slipped when he hit his head on the bench. At any rate he did hit his head, and was unconscious for almost a half-hour. When he came to, he was fighting mad. Whether he slipped or not, he'd been licked, and he wasn't a man who'd ever been licked at anything.

He got a friend to call Abel outside. "This place is getting crowded," he said.

"That's how I figure," Abel said.

It was something both of them had known would come for a long time. There was nothing to do about it.

"You'd better be gone by morning," Rusk MacLean said.

Abel said, "I never run yet."

"I don't want to see you around," Rusk said.

"I like it here," Abel said. He was stubborn when you tried to push him.

They were standing there in the moonlight by the schoolhouse, and they talked in a low flat way. One of Abel's friends and one of Rusk's friends were on hand, and nobody else except myself. I was hiding behind the outside stairs.

"Then keep your gun on," Rusk said, "because if I see you again you'd better be ready to use it." And he turned and went to the straw-roofed horse shed behind the schoolhouse.

For a couple of weeks it seemed one had always just left town when the other rode in. They lived close together, with only the yellow hill, spotted with runt sage and cedar, between them. They lived within gunshot-sound of one another, but somehow they just didn't happen to meet in those two weeks. The valley of course was waiting. The sheriff, off in the other end of the county, heard about it and showed up in town.

And then Rusk MacLean got in a jam and had to leave. He got in an argument with a stranger over a dice game, and shot the man for reaching inside his coat. But it was found the man was unarmed. He'd been reaching for a cigar. With the sheriff in town, Rusk had to travel fast. . . .

And now everything was the same, and fifty years hadn't changed a single detail as the two old men stood facing each other in the store. No doubt Rusk MacLean had squared himself with the law, or he wouldn't have come back. Before she married Abel, Bettina had made him take off his gun and leave it off. As if the competitive incentive were gone for it, Abel never had played the fiddle from that day. In fifty years he'd become wealthy, and Rusk probably had nothing; but these were irrelevant matters to two men who just couldn't get along. Neither had forgotten that the old score was still waiting to be settled. Perhaps Abel could have, but Rusk wouldn't let him.

"You'll come onto that land over my dead body," Rusk was saying now. "That's my place."

And Abel was saying in that flat and final way that seemed almost casual, as if he were resigned to unseen forces stronger than himself: "I'll start cutting hay a week from Monday."

I SAID as we drove back: "We can get the sheriff to move him off your land."

The shaggy white brows drew down, screening the eyes. "That wouldn't help," he said. And I knew he was right. To be moved off the land would only set Rusk to gunning for Abel. If Rusk were locked up for a few months he would come gunning when he got out.

I told Bettina about things when we got to the ranch. She just nodded, with her eyes wide and fixed, and I wondered if she somehow had known for fifty years that this thing would have to come sometime.

That afternoon we heard Rusk shooting, over beyond the hill. Next morning when the shooting began again, I went over there. Rusk MacLean had

fixed up a little tent that fastened to one side of his jalopy. He was standing beside it, shooting at a row of tin cans about thirty yards away. He would draw and shoot a can, put his gun back, draw it and shoot again. He hit four cans out of six shots, and then saw me watching as he reloaded.

"I can still do it," he said. "I ain't touched a gun for fifty year, but I can still do it. It's something you know once and for all, like swimmin'. All right, go tell Abe I can still do it. That's what you come to see."

I went back around the hill. Rusk could still do it. True, I could *see* him draw, now; that lightning movement too fast for the eye had slowed with age. And he'd missed two of the cans. But age had slowed Abel Calhoon just as much, and Abel never had been as fast as Rusk.

As I came into the ranch yard I heard a strange sound—the moan of a fiddle being tuned. And from over the hill came a shot as Rusk practiced.

I went in. Bettina was sitting in the corner rocker, sort of shrunken and intent, and before the fireplace Abel was standing with his old fiddle. He'd wiped off the dust with a cloth, and he was twisting the pegs, tuning. A rotten string snapped, and he said, "Jake, run into town and get a set of strings."

When I got back he put them on, and tuned up. Everything was like it had been half a century ago. He played a couple of experimental scales, then broke into *The Arkansas Traveler*. I'm no musician, but it sounded good to me, and fast. Not as fast as he'd done it fifty years back, maybe, but fast. He played it through, then switched to *The Irish Washerwoman*. He made a mistake in this, and had to start over. He got through the second time, then started on *The Arkansas Traveler* again, made a mistake, repeated it, began trying it slow, and then he slowly took the fiddle from under his chin and walked to his rocker. He sat there looking at nothing, and for the first time in my life I really realized that Abel Calhoon was very old.

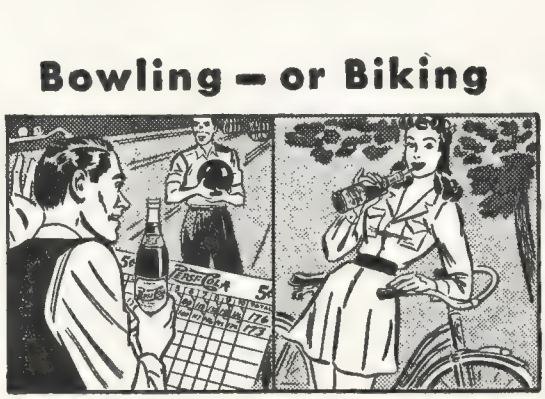
"That was fine!" I said.

"Just as good as you ever were, Abel," Bettina seconded.

He shook his head, and under the shaggy brows the eyes kept looking at nothing.

"No use. . ." he muttered. "No use. . . ."

We could hear Rusk practicing for about two hours that day. When the shots began again next morning, I whispered to Bettina and she went into her bedroom, coming out with the old cartridge belt. The single-action Peacemaker in the holster had been greased and wrapped in oiled silk. I cut the old grease off with gasoline, and oiled the gun again. I'd got five hundred cartridges when I went for the fiddle strings. I tried the gun out; it shot as good as new. Then I worked over the holster, inside and out, with harness oil. I buckled on the belt, and tried the gun in the holster. It slid in and out without sticking. All the time, I could hear the



boom of Rusk's gun, way over the hill.

"Well, she's all ready," I told Abel. "You'd better get in some practice."

He shook his head. "No use," he said. "I haven't touched a gun for fifty years. Special muscles have got to be trained, and—well, you saw what I did on the fiddle. There's not enough time to practice."

"You've got as much time as Rusk—well, almost as much."

"No use."

I tried to argue with him, and he got mad. Pulling his white brows into a line, he roared: "Don't be a damned fool! This is my fight and I'm doing it my own way!"

"But Rusk—"

"What Rusk MacLean does is his own business! If he wants to practice all day and all night, it's nothing to do with me!"

I talked with Bettina, and she went to work on him. Abel crawled into his shell. He can be the stubbornest man in the world when he wants to be. You can't argue with a man who just pays no attention. He just drew into his shell and wouldn't speak a word all day. We could hear Rusk practicing for about three hours.

The next day it was the same, and the next. Abel just wouldn't talk about practice. He wouldn't even put the belt around his waist to get used to the weight of the gun. He would just sit out on the porch. Over the hill would come the boom of Rusk's gun. I fancied that Abel listened for the shots, like a man waiting for the other shoe to drop; but again, I might have been fancying.

On Friday the sheriff came out.

"What's this I hear about you two old fools?" the sheriff asked.

Abel looked innocent as a baby. "What do you mean?"

"I hear that Rusk MacLean has squatted on your land. Do you want me to move him off?"

"Why, no Sheriff. I told him he could have a piece to build a shack on. He used to own the basin over the hill, you know."

"Yes, I know," the sheriff said. "Look here, Abel, you're too old a man for this foolishness."

"What foolishness?"

"Well, everybody knows . . . !" began the sheriff, exasperated. A shot sounded from over the hill. "Now, why is MacLean practicing his shooting for five or six hours a day?"

"If he wants to waste good ammunition, it's no business of mine. Or yours neither."

The sheriff worked his lower lip between his teeth awhile, looking at innocent old Abel Calhoon. "Now, look, Abel," he said. "Times have changed. You're both old men."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Abel said.

The sheriff stamped out to his car, and drove around the hill. The shooting stopped for a few minutes, then began again.

We could hear Rusk practicing Saturday, for about two hours. Then on Sunday he just took a half-dozen shots, and there was silence. Rusk MacLean was ready.

I DIDN'T sleep any Sunday night. As dawn began breaking I heard somebody making up the fire. When I went in the kitchen, Bettina was putting on the coffee pot. She didn't say anything. Her hands were shaking. I went outside. The valley was purple in the dawn, chill and very quiet. I saw Abel coming from the stable, leading a saddle horse. He hadn't ridden a horse in twenty years. A stubborn man in his way, Abel Calhoon. He'd always liked horses with spirit—horses that gave a man a workout when he slipped quickly into the saddle. A horse that wouldn't uncork a few crowhops in the morning was only fit for kids and ladies, or coyote bait, he'd claimed. When he took a bad fall once, Bettina put her foot down about such horses. Rather than ride a kid horse, Abel didn't ride any more. Maybe after the fall he knew a man past fifty didn't have any business getting shook up, anyhow. But now he was leading the saddle horse across the yard in the dawn, as if it were fifty years back and he was starting out on a day's riding again.

"I'm not hungry," he said in the kitch-

en. His face was gray, and his eyes sunken a bit. I guess he hadn't got much sleep, either.

"Have a cup of coffee, anyway," Bettina urged.

He nodded his head. He sat with his hands flat on the table on either side of the cup for several minutes. When he lifted his right hand finally and took hold of the cup handle, the hand didn't shake.

"Jake," he said when he'd finished the coffee, "have you got the mowers in shape?"

"Yes."

"Tell the boys we'll start cutting the basin hay this morning. I'll go over first and make sure it's ready."

I had to admire his nerve, and I didn't let myself think one minute ahead of the present. Then he strapped on his gun. Very carefully he felt a single time of the bone hilt, as if to make sure it was in the old place. Then he went out. He unwrapped the line from the hitching pole, then, one hand on the bridle and one on the horn, got into the saddle with that old quick motion of a man trained to horses that begin crowhopping the instant weight hits their backs. But times have changed, and we gentle the horses more, now. The horse just stood still.

"Oh," said Abel, and swung down. He'd forgotten to kiss Bettina. She was wonderful. She didn't cling to him. Then he got up again, but a bit awkwardly this time, and headed around the hill. As I went for the car I heard a single muffled sob from Bettina.

I drove around behind him. The early light was white and clear now. We got around the hill and Rusk MacLean was standing fifty yards beyond the wire gate leading to the basin hay land. Rusk was tall and lean, standing there waiting, grim and formidable, his sweeping mustache contrasting to his leathery face.

I stopped the car. Abel Calhoon rode up to the gate. It was down.

"Don't come onto my land," Rusk MacLean said.

Abel swung off his horse, and stood a moment. His hair seemed very white in the clear light. I knew he didn't have a chance; but that would make no difference to Abel Calhoon, I knew.

Then I wondered if I'd been wrong about him, when he spoke.

"I've had no practice," he said. That was the wrong thing to say, and I felt embarrassed for him. Why had he come right up to the gate and then backed down?

"Go home and practice, then," Rusk MacLean said in a thin contemptuous way. "What you do is no affair of mine, so long as you keep off my land."

"I'll try just one shot," Abel Calhoon said, "to see if I'm as good as I used to be." He turned from the open gate and picked up one of the cans Rusk had been practicing on. It had two holes in it. Abel put it on a fence post and stepped off twenty paces. Then he extended his right arm level with his shoulder, and I saw there was a silver dollar on the back of his hand.

AN idea suddenly came to me, and I put my hands in my pockets to keep them from shaking. It was a long moment as Abel Calhoon stood there in the morning light, arm outstretched and the dollar on the back of his hand. Then the hand came down for the gun and the dollar began falling. Things seemed curiously slow, the hand making that old smooth motion down and up, and the dollar floating to earth. There was a little spurt of dust as the dollar hit the ground, and at that instant Abel's

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old Peacemaker roared. The can hopped from the fence post. That was good shooting. It wasn't as good as Abel had been capable of fifty years ago, but it still was good shooting, and marvelous shooting for an old man. Abel put the gun in the holster with slow deliberation.

"Ain't as bad as I might be," he said. Then he looked over at the other old man, and said, "Well, Rusk?"

I was all quivery inside, and I was afraid to breathe. I knew now why Abel Calhoon hadn't practiced shooting during the past week. I was remembering how he'd played that fiddle after fifty years—at first almost as well as ever, and then how he'd stumbled as the old muscle-memory quickly faded. I remembered how he'd got on that horse a few minutes ago—first in almost the old smooth way, and then a bit awkwardly the second time. And I knew Abel Calhoon had counted on that old muscle reflex to get his gun out just once in the old way. But now he'd done it. He'd pulled the gun that once, and shot it once, smooth and straight and true like he'd been able to do fifty years before. But now his old wrist would be a bit numbed from the heavy kick of the weapon. The old muscle-memory would be almost gone. The next time he tried to draw, he'd do it *consciously* and not from reflex.

"Well, Rusk?" I heard him saying again.

Rusk MacLean muttered a curse. He strode past and to his old jalopy, and began throwing his tent and things into it.

I began breathing again.

When the jalopy clattered out of sight around the hill, old Abel Calhoon relaxed, and I had to help him to the car. As I drove slowly back, with the horse tied to the rear bumper, I said, "You damned old fool! Sure, Rusk had practiced that old trick with the dollar during the past week, and he knew how much he'd slowed down—but what if he had guessed you could only do it just once? You never were as fast as he was. You would have been slow as molasses the second time. What if he'd guessed it? What if he'd guessed you could only get that gun out in the old way just once?"

We were coming around the hill, and Abel Calhoon's eyes were looking straight forward under the jutting white brows. "Bettina's waiting," he said, looking at the figure of the little old woman standing by the hitching rack before the ranch-house. "We've got a lot to do to get ready for the golden wedding shindig."

And he's never mentioned Rusk MacLean from that day to this.

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YOU GOTTA BE HARD

By

BILL GULICK

Steve hit him then . . . a savage blow that dropped him limp as a drenched rag.

SITTING on the running board of the big truck parked at the side of the country road, Steve Burke stared dumbly at the way the muscles rippled in the backs of his hands as he mechanically clenched and unclenched his fists. It didn't relieve the strain of waiting much, but it helped keep you from thinking. Three hours it had been now. Three hours.

The knot of overalled, booted men on the other side of the road broke up and Steve could see the doctor pushing his way through. He stood up.

"Well, doc?"

"It's no use. The man's been stone dead ever since the current hit him. We're giving up with the pulmotor."

Mutely, Steve clenched his fists again and the nails bit deep into the palms. Unseeing, he heard the doctor move away, heard his low-voiced orders as the blanket-wrapped body was carried to the ambulance. Then the black-paneled car was rumbling off down the road, siren silent now. As silent, thought Steve, as Bentley ever since the stuff first hit him.

Lifting his eyes, he stared up at the wires thirty feet above him, black pencil lines against the pale sky. Sudden death, they were, four thousand volts waiting in that bare copper to surge through the man who got the least bit careless. Yet you had to work the stuff standing on steel hooks sunk deep in a creosote-

oozing pole, your body part of a near-perfect ground, with no insulation but a pair of rubber gloves and leather protectors which came only halfway up your forearms. And he, Steve Burke, was the guy paid to send men up to work it.

When his somber eyes came back to the ground again, three of those men were standing before him—Blackie, Lars, Sandy. Three of the best linemen ever laid a glove on a hot wire. Grimly he wondered if the break were coming now, wondered if the strain which had been building up through these last four weeks of hell was at last going to snap the nerves of one of the three. And which one would it be?

Eyes flinty, he searched the faces of the silent men. Blackie, leader of the trio, dark, big, with hands like sides of beef. A gorilla wearing climbing irons and a safety belt. Steve had once seen him carry a two hundred pound transformer down a pole, and Steve didn't laugh—as did some of the hard-heads—at Blackie's boast that he could have carried the pot back up the thirty foot stick if he'd had a mind to.

Lars, also dark, but built on the squat side; cold of eye and not a nerve in his body. Steve had seen him stand for ten minutes at a time with a live sixty-six thousand volt wire on the other end of his eight foot hot stick, holding it steady as death in spite of the sleet-laden gale tearing at his face and the ice-covered pole under him bucking like a thing alive.

Sandy, youngest of the three, hardly more than a kid. Blue of eye and sensitive of nature. But limber as a willow, a striped cat on a pole, and a knowledge of wiring and circuits that equalled Steve's own.

Which of the three, Steve wondered, would break?

Then suddenly it came to him that he was a fool to wait for one of them to make the first move. You had to be hard to survive in this game and landing the first punch, brutal though it might be, was half the battle.

"Blackie," he snapped, "get up in the air an' finish the tie Bentley was makin'. You help him, Lars. Sandy, I want you to disconnect that transformer on the third pole down the line. Be sure you use your rubbers to open those disconnects—she's hot as hell."

For a moment the old habit of obeying the foreman's orders without question held the three men and they moved as if to do the tasks assigned them. Hitching up his low-hanging tool belt, Blackie turned to squint up at the pole above him, Lars turning with him. But Sandy hesitated, rebellion smoldering in his eyes. Then abruptly he wheeled back on Steve with a wild torrent of words.

"Is that all you're goin' to say—'be sure you use your rubbers?' Is that all you're goin' to do—put us back to work as if nothin' happened? Bentley burned to a crisp in the stuff an' you not even botherin' to help do something for him. Sittin' there on the fender of the truck wishin' the doc would hurry up an' pronounce him dead so you could get on with the job! The job! Damn the job!"

SILENTLY, Steve took it, hoping maybe the kid would work some of it off. Better that way than to have it all pile up inside you. The rest of the crew was gathering around now, standing there uncertainly, sullenly. Gus, the truck driver, Croupy, Pete, Little Joe, all waiting for something and not sure what. Lars lay a steadying hand on Sandy's shoulder.

"Easy, kid. Things like this happen an' there ain't much anybody can do."

"Yeah," Blackie rumbled in that deep voice of his. "Ain't a thing anybody can do."

Angrily, the tow-headed lineman shook off the placating hand. "Kid yourselves if you want to," he blazed. "Go on thinkin' what happened to Bentley was just an accident. But I'm sick of bein' driven like I was a machine by this man-killer that calls himself a foreman. I'm sick of doin' the dirty work for a man with no more feeling in him than so much cement!"

"You've gone far enough, Sandy," Steve cut in, voice toneless as a winch line rasping through a rusty snatch block.

Unbuckling his tool belt, Sandy sneered. "Not yet, I ain't. I'm through, Burke—through with you an' your rotten ways. But first I'm goin' to mash that dead pan look off your face an' see what kind of guts you really got under your thick hide."

Steve hit him then, a savage, brutal blow that landed on the side of the kid's chin and dropped him limp as a drenched rag at the feet of Lars and Blackie. Hard jaw outthrust and eyes flashing a challenge, Steve glared at the other two linemen.

"Either of you got ideas like that?" he said softly. Lars' square face was expressionless but there was a dangerous twitching of muscles along his jawbones. Plainly, he was waiting for Blackie to lead the way. But the big, gorilla-like lineman only stood there.

"You shouldn't ought to a hit the kid that way, Steve. He was took pretty hard by what happened to Bentley."

"He was just off his nut for a minute," added Lars. "This is the first time he ever seen a man get into the stuff."

"Then the sooner he learns you can't let things like this bother you, the better," Steve said coldly. "He's got to learn you gotta be hard in this game."

Helping Sandy up with clumsy yet gentle hands, Blackie raised his eyes and stared at Steve with a queer look. The foreman turned away.

"You fellas carry on here. I got to go phone in a report to Henderson."

Without a backward glance he left them, cutting across a field of newly cut wheat stubble toward a nearby farmhouse where he knew he would find a phone. Skipper Henderson, division maintenance superintendent of Plains States Power & Light, would be wanting a report on Bentley's death. In his mind Steve framed the words: "Bentley on a pole making a hot connection on a four thousand volt, three-phase line. Working with rubber gloves on the middle wire, seemed to forget where he was for a moment and brushed a bare elbow against the outside wire. In the current about one minute before circuit could be broken."

Those would be the words, Steve reflected. Cold, precise, curt. Yet they would carry the picture to every person who had ever seen the stuff grab a lineman. The moment of frozen horror, the hoarse screams on the ground, the utter silence of the black figure sagging limply in his belt up there in the air.

Topping a small knoll, Steve moved down into a shallow depression. He stopped, looked around. The men working on the highline three hundred yards away couldn't see him. He couldn't be seen from the farmhouse. Gradually the hard lines of his face sagged, beaded sweat broke out on his temples. Face going a ghastly color, he sank down to his hands and knees in the crisp, dusty stubble.

Then Steve Burke, hard-driving foreman of the finest hot line crew in the Plains States organization, became very sick to his stomach. . . .

PACING the streets that night, Steve fought it out with himself as he had a dozen times before. Things like this happened; they went with the game and you had to take them and forget them. But the old fear, ingrained deep in him, refused to be reasoned away. It was a fear, he knew, born out of weakness, born on that night two years ago when he had climbed up across the steel framework of the sub-station and lowered Glenn's lifeles body to the ground. He hadn't strapped on a climbing iron since. Perhaps if he had, if he'd tested himself before the weakness became so strong, things would be different now.

The cigarette between his fingers burned them and he threw it away with a curse. What he needed was a drink.

The barroom in Sol's place was nearly empty when he entered, only one table being occupied. Suddenly his face hardened. Grouped around three sides of the square table were Blackie, Lars and Sandy. There was a vacant space on the fourth side and a chair sitting before it but even as Steve noticed that, the men saw him.

With no sign of recognition in his dark eyes, Blackie stared straight at the foreman. Then he gave the chair a kick, sending it spinning across the room. Neither Lars nor Sandy appeared

to notice the gesture but its meaning was plain enough to Steve.

You worked for your foreman, took orders from him on the job that sometimes meant placing your life in his hands. But you didn't have to drink with him. And he didn't drink with you unless invited.

"Whiskey, straight," Steve said to the bartender. Toying with the drink he smiled sardonically, remembering how it was in the old days when the situation was reversed; he and Glenn and Henderson climbing poles and somebody else cracking the whip over them. They had been close together, the three of them. Like Blackie and Lars and Sandy.

Queer, how things had turned out. Henderson moving on up with the company, holding down a superintendent's job now and seeming to remember no part of the way things used to be. Himself, Steve Burke, a stranger to the men who worked for him; made so, he knew, by the hard shell he wore to cover his weakness. And Glenn—dead.

Steve lifted the glass quickly and drank—alone.

IT was routine, Steve knew, that he should be called into Henderson's office before taking the crew out the next morning. But standing there before the portly, gray-haired superintendent, he wondered why only himself and Henderson were in the room. Usually after a serious accident a sort of inquisition was held in which safety engineers, company officials and brass hats cross-questioned a foreman in the manner of a third degree.

"Sit down, Steve," Henderson said. Finding a chair, Steve lit a cigarette and the hand that held the match was steady. Bleakly, he waited for it, but the superintendent made no mention of the accident.

"I need your help, Steve," he said after a silence in which the only sound was the nervous tapping of his fingernails on the glass-topped desk. "I've got a hurry-up job that has to have a foreman who can get something done."

"You're the boss. I been ramroddin' hurry-up jobs for the last two years an' I guess I can stand another one. What's the dope?"

Haltingly, almost embarrassedly, Henderson gave it to him, and as the details of the job unfolded, Steve stiffened with suspicion. It wasn't like the Skipper to beat around the bush this way; usually he spit it out straight from the shoulder in terse meaty sentences. There was something queer about the job, too. Ten miles of rural line—routine cold construction work and you couldn't call it anything else, even if it did run to one of the new war industry plants. The kind of job any foreman could do in his sleep.

There were plenty of crews better equipped to do this job than his own, Steve knew. His was exclusively a hot line crew; they made the repairs on existing lines, made hot connections for the several construction crews which were working in the vicinity. During the past month it had been that way, Steve and his men having almost more work than they could handle, Steve having to drive them hard with plenty of overtime.

"I figure you ought to be able to do this job in about two weeks," Henderson concluded his explanation.

"What are you goin' to use for a hot crew meantime?" said Steve. The moment he asked the question he knew he'd hit the point Henderson was getting around to. The superintendent's gaze dropped.

"Why, the same crew we been using. Yours. You see, Steve, I figured Blackie could ramrod it while you were gone. Save breaking in a new bunch."

Steve got it then, and for an instant the hardness inside him was gone and there was sharp pain in its place. They were easing him out. Letting him down the slow way. First from foreman of the hot crew to construction foreman; then there would be excuses why he couldn't come back to the hot gang; construction work would peter out gradually; he'd be given a job patrolling lines. Then some morning he'd wake up with no job at all. He'd seen it happen before when a man got to where he could cut it no longer and didn't know it. Now Henderson was giving the gate to him, the easy

way for old times' sake. He knew it.

Steve stood up. He wouldn't crawl to any man and he wouldn't beg. "You're the boss, Skipper. I s'pose you want me to change over this mornin'?"

"No—no hurry," Henderson said hastily. "Go on out with your own bunch today. You can give Blackie some pointers so he can take over tomorrow or next day." Awkwardly, he paused. "Steve, I—"

"Yeah?" Steve said harshly. Frowning, Henderson looked queerly at him a moment. Then he shook his head.

"Nothing. You can go now."

STEVE could tell by the attitude of the men on the job later that morning that they knew. It showed in the eager, anxious-to-please way they stumbled over their own feet in their hurry to carry out his orders, the too-gruff, awkward manner in which they tried to make jokes with him. Even Sandy, though his swollen face gave mute evidence of Steve's blow of the day before, made a couple of attempts at jokes.

He took it as he had taken everything else from them—hard-faced, cold-eyed. It was all an act, he knew, that you put on for a man on his way out. Sort of a last meal for a condemned man. It left him with a sourish taste in his mouth.

This was the hardest of all to take in silence; this was the last thing he had ever thought he would have to take from his men. He could abide their hatred; he could contend with open rebellion as he had yesterday. But he knew now that one of the three linemen and possibly all of them had gone beyond that. They had gone sneaking to Henderson, probably telling him all sorts of lies about the accident yesterday. Blackie, of course, stood to profit most by it. He would take over Steve's job.

Well, he could have it, Steve thought bitterly. He wouldn't whimper. If Henderson would stoop to believe such tales without bringing them out in the open man to man, then he had no desire even to defend himself.

It was early afternoon when the line truck pulled to a stop at a country road junction where the crew was to replace an old, rotting pole in the four thousand volt oil-field line with a new one. Swinging down out of the cab, Steve frowned when he saw the set-up. The pole to be changed out stood on the northwest of the intersection, part of the line which ran east and west, and it had needed changing for a long time.

It was white with age and weather, an untreated cedar pole, Steve noticed, rather than the pressure-creosoted pine which Plains States now used exclusively. It had been a long time since he had seen one of this kind. Even back in the days when he first went to work for the company the cedars were on their way out. But in bull sessions he had heard the old linemen spin yarns about them, cussing the way the dry wood splintered under your gaffs, how they would look solid on the outside yet be so worm eaten that they'd fall over when you started to climb them.

Fifty feet east of the cedar pole, a north-south line crossed under the four thousand volt circuit. It was not yet in service, Steve knew, and there was a construction crew working on it. That would make removing the cedar a somewhat trickier job.

"How you figure on switchin' her out?" said Blackie at his elbow.

Steve turned and stared coldly at the big lineman. "Bein' as you're takin' over this crew tomorrow, s'posin' you tell me how you'd do it."

Blackie's eyes glittered angrily an instant, then squinting up at the pole, he said slowly, "Why, I'd untie them three hot wires from the insulators an' spread 'em apart. I'd tie a dry rope onto each wire an' have men on the ground pull one of 'em one way an' the other two the other. Then when I had 'em clear of the pole, I'd jerk it out and stick in a new one."

"I s'pose you'd let your wires sag down an' short out on that line across the road," Steve said acidly, gesturing with his thumb. It wasn't a fair thrust but some peevish devil in him had made him say it. He knew Blackie hadn't noticed the line under construction. He knew, too, that Blackie would have observed it and known his plan could not

be used before he ever started to execute it.

Mumbling something incoherent, Blackie turned away, and Steve put Croupy and Pete to work digging a hole three feet east of the cedar. There were several ways to switch out a pole and the one Blackie had suggested was the easiest and safest. But in a spot like this you had to do the job another way.

There was perhaps four feet of clearance between the wires of the hot four thousand volt line and those of the line under construction which passed below. If you untied the hot wires and let them sag down, they'd fall across the new line sure and there would be hell to pay, Steve knew. He'd have to set in his new pole first, tie in the wires on it, and then, having something to support the line, cut down the old cedar.

Looking around in the weed filled ditch at the roadside, he discovered that the pole to be set in had not yet been spotted. Eloquently, he cursed the storeroom truck driver who had promised to have it here by noon. There was nothing to do now but send his own truck in after it.

"Shake a leg," he barked at Gus as the truck driver started the motor. "Get that damn stick back here by the time we finish the hole."

"I'll do 'er if I have to strip a gear," Gus promised.

WHEN the truck had disappeared down the road, Steve walked over to see how the men were doing with the hole. To his disgust it was only down a couple of feet and the digging shovel was chipping futilely at a solid, rocky bottom.

"Looks like we need a little dynamite," said Croupy, wiping the sweat off his forehead.

"You shoulda thought of that before the truck left," Steve growled.

Croupy grinned. "I did. I didn't know whether you'd let me use it under a hot line this way, but I got some off the truck just in case."

"Then use it. But for God's sake be careful you don't blow that cedar outa the ground. It looks plenty shaky to me."

Croupy nodded mechanically and went to work setting his charge. Steve didn't bother to watch him too closely—Croupy was more experienced with explosives than himself, he knew, and anyhow, the small charge used to loosen the rock in the hole wouldn't be powerful enough to do any damage.

But standing back a safe distance when the charge was detonated, Steve was suddenly made sharply aware of something he had always known—that there is an unpredictable quality about dynamite, one that even the most experienced powder monkey sometimes misvalues. For with the muffled roar of the explosion, a rock, no larger than a man's fist, went sailing high into the air, arcing above the pole and crossarm. Descending, the missile struck a fragile porcelain insulator a glancing blow, then tumbled on to the ground.

Steve's eyes, along with every other man's in the crew, were fastened with horror on the wires above. One of the insulators was pulverized into an infinite number of fragments, and the wire, with the remaining bit of porcelain to which it was tied, was sliding across the slightly tilted crossarm toward the end. It was the outside wire—the road phase—and there was no law of man or nature which said it should stop where it did, yet there it hung, suddenly still, inches from the end of the arm.

Nobody made a sound; the men stood paralyzed, as if any movement, any noise would provide the impetus for the bare wire to fall off the crossarm. There was no question in anyone's mind as to what would happen if it did. Relieved of support, five hundred feet of wire could sag down a long ways—far enough to fall across the new line just across the road. There were men working on that line, Steve knew, how many he couldn't even guess. Maybe half a dozen, maybe more, men handling the bare copper with unprotected, sweaty hands. Men standing on steel-bed wire-stringing trucks, the shining copper unreeling from the big spools against which they stood.

It made you sick to think about it.

"Blackie!" Steve snapped out. "Git your rubber gloves on an' go up there

an' tie her back! Hop to it quick!"

No answering bustle of movement came at Steve's hoarse command. Suddenly, he realized why. Frozen, he turned to stare at his men. Bare handed, they stood there—naked, to his eyes—not a glove sack among them. Blackie was the only one who even had on climbing irons and belt.

"They're in the truck," Blackie said and his voice was a child's horrified whisper.

Not a rubber glove, not a hot stick, not a dry rope within miles, Steve thought dully. And men on that new line, living even now only by the grace of some devilish god's whim that kept the wire above hanging precariously on the crossarm. Wonderment came to him that the wire was not shorting out, grounding through the arm and pole. Then the reason became evident.

The arm was dry, the pole was dry. Electricity followed the course of least resistance—if you could believe what the books said—so the dry pole and arm were acting as insulation. He suddenly remembered something else now, something that was never in any book. In the old days, days which he had never seen but which he had heard discussed by old time linemen, they used to work hot wires with their bare hands. There was an art to it—yet if a man had nerve, cool nerve, it could be done.

"Lars," Steve heard himself say in a cold hard voice, "you run north down that new line. Get the men off it. Sandy, you go south an' do the same. Move!"

IT wasn't much of a hope, Steve knew, that they could get the men in the clear in time. Still, it was something. Up above, that wire was swaying with the wind, scraping across the arm in a strange way, and it seemed to have moved closer to the edge in these last few seconds.

Lars was gone. Sandy was gone. Blackie stood before Steve, big, pitifully helpless.

"Give me your hooks an' belt," Steve said. The lineman stared without comprehension. Then his eyes flamed.

"You go to hell! You ain't goin' up there to git burnt up—there ain't a thing you can do."

Steve didn't stop to explain. For one thing, there was a weakness flowing into his knees, beaded sweat starting to pop out on his temples—symptoms which he had long since known. And damn it, a man had to learn sooner or later what was really inside him. Measuring the distance coldly, he moved closer to Blackie. Then he hit him, a sharp, brutal blow to the side of the chin. Staring stupidly, the big lineman weaved on his feet an instant, then abruptly collapsed.

Steve was in the air, climbing carefully up the splintery pole, before definite realization of what he intended to do came to him. His knees might have gone weak if he had stopped climbing, so he didn't stop. The steel of the climbing irons bore hard against his bootless legs just below the knee, and the pressure was somehow reassuring. He concentrated on but one thing—the dark wire above him.

Lodged somehow on the crossarm, it still hung there and he was directly under it now, moving upward with infinite caution. Then it was within his reach. Wrapping one leg about the pole, he stood with all his weight on the other, hand fumbling for the catch on the safety belt. He passed the belt around the pole, slammed the catch against the D-ring with a familiar, instinctive gesture, hardly hearing the metallic click as the snap went home.

With both hands free to work and the belt pressing hard against his hips, he leaned toward the end of the crossarm. There was time to think now—too much of it. He had worked hot stuff before; he knew what it would and wouldn't do as well any man could know such a fickle thing. But always before there had been that comforting bit of rubber and leather between his hands and the wire—rubber gloves which would test up to fifteen thousand volts. Now, there was no rubber, only his bare, sweat-moistened hands and a meager knowledge of this sort of work acquired from hearing old timers tell how the job should be done. He froze there a moment, the old fear creeping into his

stomach. There had been Glenn, Bentley, all the rest. . . .

But a man had to know sometime. He took hold of the wire then, crisply, with quick decisive movements. You had to do it that way, he knew, giving the current no time to build up its path to you—ionization, the books called it.

There was a tickling sensation, he thought, a slight tingling in his hands as they first made contact with the bare copper. He wasn't sure. For now, the wire was cold, like a slick hard icicle. Quickly he loosened the tie wire which held the useless bit of insulator to the hot phase. Then holding the phase tightly down on the wooden crossarm, he wrapped the soft copper tie wire about it in a makeshift saddle tie, twisting it about the arm and anchoring it securely with two final turns of the slack with pliers taken from the tool belt.

Then it was done and he was moving down the pole to the ground. Pausing there, he looked up, squinting with a calculating eye to see if the job was according to specifications. It was a queer looking thing from the ground—the bare wire lying on the crossarm, held there by a bit of tie wire. He almost smiled when he saw it.

Turning away, he shed the tool belt and kneeled to unstrap the hooks. When he raised up, Blackie was standing before him. The dark lineman was rubbing his jaw ruefully, but he was grinning openly.

"Steve," he said, "that took more guts than anything I ever seen."

For a moment Steve came close to going a bit soft. Then his eyes went flinty and his mouth straightened into a tight line.

"Gut's nothin'. Any fool could have done it."

He stopped suddenly and turned away. Swaggering a little as a lineman does when he tries to walk on solid ground, he moved across a field to freshly cut wheat stubble. Once, he thought he wouldn't make it and had to move a little faster to keep the weakness out of his knees. Topping a knoll at last, he turned his head to see if anyone could observe him.

Then beaded sweat broke out on his

The wire was slick and cold to his gloveless hands.

temples, a trembling shook him, and sinking to his hands and knees suddenly, for the second time in two days, he became very sick to his stomach.

IT was Henderson who suggested a drink that evening. They went to Sol's place, and finding an unoccupied corner table, sat down and ordered whiskey. The superintendent lifted his glass thoughtfully.

"You know, Steve, sometimes I wonder how a man can be as hard as you are. Seeing Glenn burn, seeing Bentley get it—then doing what you did today."

"You gotta be hard," Steve said. "That's the only way a man can get by in this game."

Henderson stared queerly at him over his drink. "Maybe so. Maybe I've got the whole thing figured wrong. For instance, me figuring that after Bentley got it you'd be needing to get away

from the hot gang for a while—needing a kind of vacation."

Steve stared at the table, not answering immediately. He could stick it out with the hot gang now, he knew; stick it out till he broke the men or they broke him. That wasn't exactly the way things ought to be. Still, if you had to be hard. . . .

A deep voice was booming out someplace in the room, he could hear it but couldn't quite locate it.

"So after you guys went tearin' off," the deep voice was saying, "he conked me an' took my hooks an' belt. Then he went up there an' fixed that damn hot wire with his bare hands."

"Lord," said somebody else, "hard as a carload of rock."

"Hard?" said the deep voice. "That's the funy part about it. When he come down off'n that pole, he was scared green. He was so scared he was sweatin' blood an' peach seeds."

Steve had located the voices now. Eyes brittle, he shoved back his chair and moved toward the other table. He had almost reached it when one of the men spoke again.

"Can you imagine the guts of a man like that? I reckon a fella would damn near go to hell an' back for that kind of foreman."

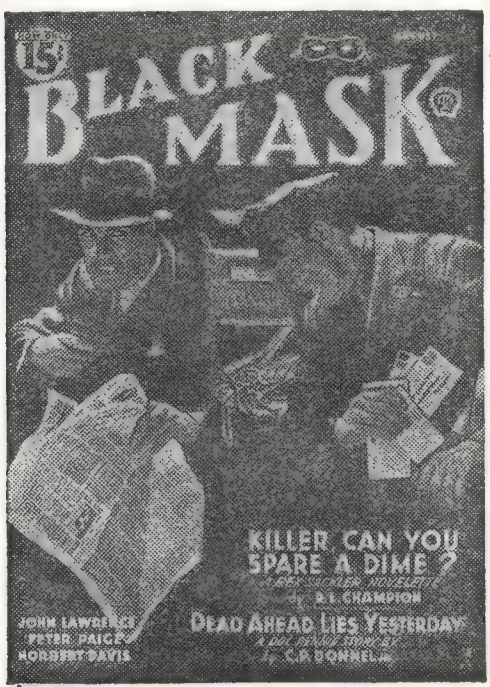
Steve would have turned and walked away then, but they saw him. There were only three chairs at the square table, but suddenly Blackie leaned out and stole one out from under a burly truck driver who was about to sit down at an adjoining table.

"Hey, Steve," the big lineman yelled, "come on over an' sit down. It's your turn to buy the drinks, you damn cheapskate!"

Steve looked around the table. There was a black and blue spot on Sandy's chin. There was a swollen place on Blackie's jaw—it would be black and blue tomorrow. Grinning, Steve sat down.

"Four whiskies," he told the waiter.

Then, staring meditatively at Lars' unmarked face over the edge of his glass, Steve Burke drank with his men.



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First came a heavy fellow with a coarse brown beard. Ragnar recognized Helgi Haffurson, nicknamed the Hard.

The Howe of Herlaug

By De WITT NEWBURY

RAGNAR the Unlucky was sitting on the rounded top of the old mound, his hound sprawling in the rough grass beside him. His eyes were on a far-off glimpse of sea, his back turned to the wooded fells inland.

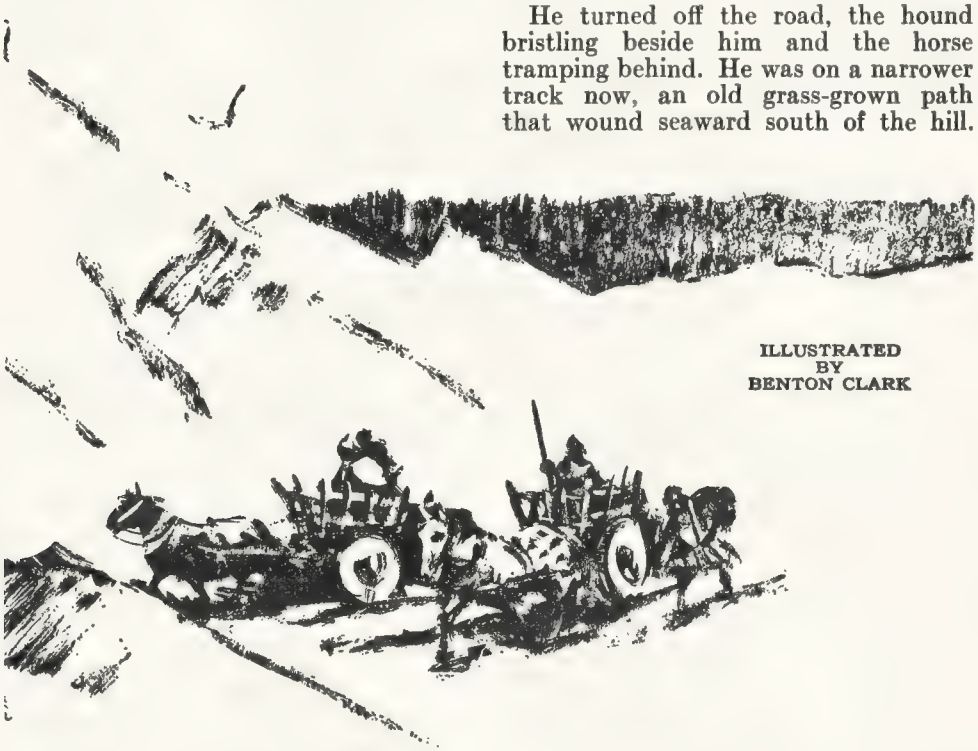
He had climbed that man-made hill because he was in trouble. It was a tomb, and he was still heathen enough to believe that the ancestor down below could give him help.

He needed it. He had earned his nickname. He had failed at harrying, failed at fur-trading. Now he had brought his few men home to his neglected farmstead, and they were trying to make a living ashore.

But spring came late that year, cold weather kept the crops back. Fishing and hunting were bad, too. As a matter of fact, a famine threatened all Naumadale, perhaps all Norway.

There was only one landholder in the entire district who had full barns, grain hoarded from last year's harvest. And he was not the man to share with his neighbors. Except at a price.

Ragnar twisted his big fists in his blond bush of beard and puzzled over the problem. How to feed five carls and seven thralls without slaughtering livestock. He couldn't afford to lose any more cattle. He had suffered one serious loss already. The red yearling bull. It had strayed away somewhere, and the wolves had probably found it.



ILLUSTRATED BY BENTON CLARK

The wolves, or—the Finn, Turi?

That was another trouble. To have a thievish thrall, a servant who pilfered so slyly that he was never caught. But then his thieving had always been small. Food, mostly, to add to his short rations. Could he have dared to make away with a whole ox?

The hound, Ulf-bane, raised a shaggy gray head and whined. Ragnar got heavily to his feet, picked up his spear. He would try more hunting and fishing, he decided. He had managed to stick a boar that day, at least.

HE WENT down the hillside, the dog loping ahead. His horse was tethered at the bottom, the tusked pig bound over the saddle. He slipped the bridle over his arm and led the stocky old dun between birch and willow thickets, out to a rough road. There he halted. Ulf-bane was growling.

A man had shouted. Somewhere to the right, amongst the tangle of growth around the mound. Ragnar listened, and heard a second voice.

He turned off the road, the hound bristling beside him and the horse tramping behind. He was on a narrower track now, an old grass-grown path that wound seaward south of the hill. A minute more and he caught sight of the two.

Strangers, leather-faced men in greasy ship-clothes. One was thickly built, with a red mustache hanging over square jowls. The other was long and bony, his beard a mat of tangled flax. They were standing on a heap of fresh earth a little above the path. Looking at something, their heads close together. They heard him coming and turned.

Ragnar let the horse go and caught Ulf-bane by the collar. He went forward, holding the big brute back with one hand, his boar-spear ready in the other.

"What's this?" he demanded. "Have you been digging?"

The men were scowling. The short one asked hoarsely, "Why not? Is it your ground?" He kept a hand behind him.

"It's the grave-mound of King Herlaug, and he was my forefather."

The lean one spoke then. "You must be Ragnar the Unlucky. Well, we have business here. With a better man than you!"

"And we haven't been digging," said the other. "This hole is a badger's earth."

Ragnar nodded; he had seen that already. "What are you hiding?" he insisted. "Show me."

"No!" snapped the short man. "The badger dug it up, but we found it. Finding is keeping." His free hand dropped to his sword.

The dog lunged with teeth bared, and Ragnar strode nearer. "Make a move to draw weapons," he threatened, "and the Wolf-killer will tear your throat." He lifted his spear. "While you, Lint-whiskers, will feel steel in your belly."

Their hands came away from their swords. The short man went back a step. "Loki burn you!" he cursed. "Keep that demon off!"

"Show him," growled the other, "if he must be satisfied. There's no harm in a look."

The red-mustached man slowly brought out his left hand and held the thing up. A heavy old vessel, two-handled. It was black and crusted with earth, but scratches showed bright silver.

Ragnar kept his spear leveled. "Would you rob the dead?"

"Finding isn't stealing!"

"That cup belongs to King Herlaug. You must give it back."

Both men exploded into curses. "How can we do that?" they yelled. "And who are you to bid us? Are you trying to get it yourself?"

The hound snarled and strained. The spear-point flickered out. "Drop it!" Ragnar ordered. "Into the badger's hole!"

For just a moment the short man hesitated. Then he let the cup fall. It rang on a stone and rolled out of sight.

"I have done you a service," Ragnar told them. "This place is protected by the Old Gods, and they would surely take revenge on anyone who meddled with it."

THE two were still fuming when an interruption came. Sounds of creaking and rumbling, sounds of talking and laughing. Ragnar glanced back. There were horse-drawn carts out on the wider track; he could see them between the trees. And armed men were hurrying along the narrow path. Half a dozen hairy-faced carls in ring-mail and caps of hammered iron.

First came a heavy fellow with a coarse brown beard, trimmed in a fork. Ragnar recognized Helgi Haffurson, who lived a few miles southward. A man of good family and bad manners, nicknamed the Hard.

He shouted a friendly enough hail. "Health, Ragnar! What are you doing so far away from your fields? I hear you have taken to farming, like myself."

Ragnar grounded his spear-butt. "I have been killing a boar."

"Well, I am selling meal. There's a great scarcity in the land; and as I have more than others, I might as well make some profit."

He stopped, looking from one to another of the group. "What's the matter? I hope there is no quarrel. These are my kinsmen, Skag and Skiold. Their ship is in the fiord yonder, and I am bringing stores for them."

Ragnar nodded curtly. He had heard of Helgi's kinsmen, and their reputation was not too good. They were sea-robbers. No honest viking harriers, but preyers on the small coastwise merchantmen.

Helgi turned to them. "I can't take the wagons any farther. My thralls will have to carry the stuff down. Ten bags of meal, four casks of ale, and eight cheeses. You should have brought some of your crew to help."

"I wish we had!" mumbled Skag. He was the squat one.

Helgi eyed him shrewdly. "What has happened? I asked you that before."

Skiold answered. "We found an old mead cup. Made of good silver! It was lying here on the earth, where the badger had dug it out, and we wanted to keep it. But Ragnar said it should be thrown back in the hole."

"And you threw it back?"

Skiold grinned wryly. "He told us that the Old Gods were watching, and we'd better be careful."

Helgi stepped on the loose earth and peered down the burrow. "I've always heard there was silver and gold in this howe. What you found was part of a treasure!"

"No such thing!" Ragnar spoke up sharply. "It was the Cup of Farewell, emptied and buried when the tomb door was closed."

"Just the same," Helgi said, "there is great wealth here. It's a pity that it should stay hidden for ages and do no good to anyone." He stooped and pawed the earth. "Perhaps the badger will throw the cup out again."

Ragnar frowned. "If it is found again, it must be buried again."

Helgi straightened himself. "I should have something to say about that! My own ancestor had a hand in making this mound."

"But only Herlaug rests here. You are descended from Rollaug, who preferred to live longer and lie somewhere else."

Helgi laughed. "What's the difference? They were brothers."

"Yes," Ragnar said, "I know the story. They were brother kings, and ruled Naumadale together. They built the howe together, to hold their bones when they died. It was a splendid one. A regular hall of stone, with earth piled over it and a passage leading down.

"But about that time King Harald Fairhair began to conquer the whole of Norway. The smaller kings went down before him, one after another. And when his army marched against their country, Harlaug and Rollaug were troubled. They were not strong enough to withstand him; because their sons, with most of the young men, were off harrying in Ireland.

"Rollaug wanted to submit to King Harald and save his life, but Herlaug wouldn't agree. He had been a mighty warrior in his day, and said he would rather die undefeated.

"So he had food and drink carried into the howe, with lamps for light. And he went inside with eleven faithful drengs, his old berserks. Then the passage was closed and covered up."

"He took his treasure in, too," Helgi interrupted.

"Yes! But first he sacrificed a white horse on the mound and asked the protection of Thor and Tyr. For three days the king and his men feasted in the tomb. Those outside could hear faint sounds of shouting and singing when they put their ears against the earth. Then there was silence forever.

"Yet I think those old fellows are feasting still, under that pile. Or at least their bones are feasting there, while their spirits feast in Valhalla."

SKAG and Skiold had listened with eyes and mouths open, Helgi impatiently. Now he spat and wiped his beard with a hairy-backed hand. "We are wasting time, kinsmen," he grunted. "Lead the way to the ship, and I'll get my gang started."

Ragnar stood aside, holding horse and dog, while a file of sweating thralls lumbered past him with their loads. Helgi watched them out of sight, then came back, rubbing his hands together.

"If you need barley meal," he offered, "I have ten sacks left over."

Ragnar shook his head doubtfully. "How can I make payment? Your price is high, I suppose."

"Yes, these are bad times. We'll arrange it somehow, though—and bind the bargain at your steading, if you have anything to drink."

Ragnar couldn't refuse hospitality. "We have plenty of ale," he urged. "This boar is well-fleshed, and some of my men are out after salmon. Come along!"

Helgi called an order as they reached the road, and the one loaded cart creaked up. They turned inland up the valley, Ragnar leading his horse and a couple of armed carls following with the wagon.

The hound, Ulf-bane, was free to run now, and had been ranging the woods as the men went slowly along. Suddenly he

appeared, bursting out of a thicket ahead. He had something clamped in his jaws. A skinned foreleg, with the hoof and a bit of red hide still on it.

Ragnar stopped short and pointed. "My lost yearling! My red bull!"

Helgi looked and whistled. "A meat-thief has been at work."

Ragnar nodded gloomily. "Yes, some ill-minded niddering has butchered my fine young bull in the forest. Perhaps I know who!"

"You suspect somebody?" Helgi asked.

"One of my own thralls. We have all suspected him of stealing, though we never could catch him at it. Meal has been taken from the bin, smoked fish from the loft. And that was unfair enough when good men were going hungry. Well, he'll be caught this time!"

Ragnar said no more, but marched ahead with a grim face until they had reached the farmstead. Then, while Helgi's followers were unloading the cart, he left his horse standing, went to the big log house and called: "Tring!"

The man limped out, a whiskered, weather-toughened old seaman with a white sword-scar slanting across one cheek. Ragnar questioned him. "Where is Turi, the Finnish thrall?"

"In the field with the others. Is anything wrong?"

"We'll soon find out. Come with me."

They went to the row of tumble-down huts where the thralls lived. Ragnar poked his head through a door, and his suspicion was confirmed. The smell of drying hide was strong in the close air.

There were poles set crosswise overhead, making a sort of loft. He gripped the edge and pulled himself up. The bull-hide was there, salted and stretched.

He vaulted down. "This is a serious matter. Call in the thralls, and have Turi guarded.

"Shall I kill him?" Tring asked simply.

Ragnar shook his head. "Not without judgment. He shall have a trial, but that must wait until our guests have been feasted." He cast an eye around the bare hut. "We could use the meat, but of course it has been sold—it would bring a handful of silver in these times. We must tighten our belts while some rascal guzzles our beef!"

THERE was food enough for the feast, though not too much. Ragnar and Helgi sat on a bench together, their carls ranged along the board on each side. The thralls served, padding over the rough floor on broad, bare feet. Only Turi crouched in a corner, hugging his knees, dumbly waiting for his master's attention.

Helgi Haffurson loosened his belt, stretched his legs under the table and lifted his ale-horn. "You spoke of the Old Gods today, Ragnar," he puffed. "Well, I think they must have lost strength, or perhaps they have left the country. This new religion has spread everywhere. I have turned Christian myself, like everybody else."

"I have done the same," Ragnar said, "and I hope it will soon change my luck."

Helgi grinned. "No man in Norway needs that more! It's often told how you were homeward bound from the Southlands, with your ship full of booty. And how you were compelled to float it all out on the sea, lashed to foot-boards, so the Orkneymen would stop chasing you to pick it up."

Ragnar swore—a heathen oath. "Odin's blind eye! The story is all wrong, Helgi, if it doesn't do me credit! I fought one Orkney ship and cleared it. Killed the whole crew! Then, when half my men were dead, I saw two more bearing down. I was forced to run.

"But the trick should be praised, not blamed. It made my enemies stop and fight each other for the stuff I threw overboard. It saved my own ship."

Helgi chuckled. "To be blown ashore, afterwards, on the way from Finmark. With the loss of a fine cargo of furs and most of your crew."

Ragnar dropped his horn and turned a fire-red face. "Nothing could have lived in that westerly gale!" He chewed back his anger. He couldn't quarrel with a guest at his own board.

The other was not through. "If you want a change of luck, you know where to find it. You had it under your two feet today."

Ragnar stared. "What are you talking about?"

"About Herlaug's Howe. About the treasure hidden there. Enough yellow gold and white silver to make us both lucky!"

"Lucky!" Ragnar answered sternly. "Those who meddle with the tomb will find ill luck, not good. Get that treasure out of your head! It belongs to an old hero, and it is guarded by Thor and Tyr."

"The hero was your forefather," Helgi persisted. "My own forefather helped to build the mound. Have we no rights? And the Old Gods have grown weak."

"They have guarded King Herlaug's grave for two hundred years," Ragnar told him. "They'll guard it a while longer. No more of such talk!"

He swung around on the bench, still red-faced and angry. "Turi, you thief!" he bellowed. "Come and be judged!"

The Finn came, a little man with colorless cat-whiskers on a thin, high-boned face. Nimble enough generally, but now his feet were dragging. He stood in front of Ragnar and slowly lifted his head.

Ragnar scowled at the thrall. "It was a base thing, Turi, to rob a good master and destroy a strong young bull."

Turi was trembling. "I didn't!" he protested. "I found the hide in the wood, thrown over a dead branch. Somebody else had slaughtered the bull—yes, and gutted it, too. The entrails were lying there with the head and hoofs."

His master frowned down for a moment. "You found the stripped hide and the offal! And said nothing! Why didn't you run quickly to tell me of such a robbery?"

The little Finn looked at the ground. "I needed that hide. See, I am almost bare! A thrall ought to have good leather breeches. It is his right."

Ragnar glared at him. "Couldn't you trust your master to provide them?"

"I was afraid you would use the leather yourself. I knew your own clothes weren't any too sound."

That was enough for Ragnar. "So I must wear ragged breeches," he snorted, "while my servant has new ones! You may be telling the truth, though I don't believe it. But you talk too much of your rights, Turi. You have gone too far!

"You shall have thirty strokes of the birch stick. And I won't keep you any longer! You shall be sold. Or given away, if I can find no purchaser."

Then Helgi spoke, grinning his hard grin. "I'll take him in payment of the ten bags of meal."

"It's a bargain," said Ragnar. He motioned the thrall away, without noticing his imploring look or the tears that suddenly spilled over his thin cheeks.

IT WAS a week later, and the men of the household were sitting over a meal of fish and barley bread.

Old Tring swallowed a mouthful and washed it down with ale. "We are eating Turi," he said sadly.

Another, Alf, laid a crust on the board. "I'd rather have the lad himself. He was always ready with a joke. He could whistle the wind up and down, sing for rain or sunshine. A good Finn!"

Ragnar said nothing. He had missed the little man more than he wanted to admit.

Then Tring stopped eating to listen, held up a hand for silence. They heard a swift pattering outside, the sound of bare feet on hard ground. A shadow flickered through the open door; and Turi was lying on the floor, face down.

The housecarls stared, astonished. Ragnar turned in his place. "What's this?" he demanded. "Have you run away from Helgi, who bought you fairly?"

Turi struggled to his knees. Matted hair hung over his eyes. Clotted weals showed on his half-naked body. His feet were cut and bloody.

"Keep me!" he panted. "I'd rather be starved by you than fed by Helgi the Hard!"

Ragnar frowned down. "A thrall never loves a good master until too late. You are growing worse, Turi! You have stolen yourself now. This is a great offense, and I must send you back to your owner."

The Finn sobbed, fighting for breath. "No, you won't do that—after you hear what I have run so fast to tell!"

"Give him ale," said Ragnar.

Turi drank and got painfully to his feet. "I stayed at Helgi's garth and

worked well, though I was treated ill. Your birch stick is better than the walrus-hide whip he uses! And yesterday his kinsmen came in from the sea. Their names are Skag and Skiold, and they are bad men. Helgi welcomed and feasted them.

"They sat at the board all night. I served; and afterwards, while they drank and talked, I hid behind the ale-casks.

"Skag and Skiold complained because they had caught no trading ships lately. They talked much together about ways of getting rich, and at last they agreed on a plan. They are going to rob the tomb of your forefather, King Herlaug!"

Ragnar sat tugging his yellow beard, his brows bent over smoldering eyes. "Have these robbers no respect for the dead?" he wondered. "Do they care nothing for Thor and Tyr? Are you telling the truth, Turi?"

"Ay, master! It was Helgi's scheme. He urged it on the others. He said the Old Gods had gone away, or else had lost their strength. And he said he knew where to dig, because of a badger hole and a mead cup."

Ragnar struck the table with his fist. "By Hel, Mother of Death! If the gods don't punish them, I'll do it myself. And in such a way that no man, ever again, shall dare to dishonor the Howe of Herlaug!" He stamped to his feet, upsetting the bench behind him.

The housecarls started up, reaching for the weapons hanging on the wall. "We must do something about this," growled Tring. "Grave-robbing! Breaking a hero's rest and stealing his property!"

Alf rumbled agreement. "It would be shameful to sit here and let such things happen!"

The rest, Tord, Havtor and Bruki, joined in. "Shall we go against them, or defend the mound?"

"We could make a stand on the top with spears and arrows."

"Or an ambush in the birch thickets. Surprise is a good weapon."

Ragnar waved a hand for quiet. "When will they commit this wickedness?" he asked the thrall. "Did you hear that?"

"Tonight! They were still swilling ale when I came away, and boasting to get up courage. They must have some sleep first."

"You have done well," Ragnar told him. "If I live, you shall be mine again."

He spoke to the carls. "We are too few for an open fight. Skag and Skiold have a ship-gang of twenty sea-wolves, and Helgi has six tough fellows.

"So we'll defend the mound—but not from the top. We'll make an ambush—but not in the birch thickets. Surprise is a good weapon, yet there's a better. Fear!

"You will have to trust me in this matter, as I trust you. Even though I am called the Unlucky." He scanned the weathered faces around him and was satisfied.

The Finn knelt and caught hold of Ragnar's hand. "There is one thing more!"

Ragnar bent down. "What is it, Turi?"

"Skag and Skiold butchered the red bull. To salt for their ship. I heard them laughing about it."

Ragnar hauled him upright. "Then you have suffered wrong. You shall be made a freedman, and have cattle of your own!"

THE spring night was not very dark. The carls sat on their shields in the shadow of the birches, while the thralls worked. They were afraid, those seven shock-headed, bare-armed diggers. Their teeth chattered, even though sweat dripped from their scrubby beards. But Ragnar stood over them with a seal-oil torch, and they kept throwing up earth.

They were breaking into the northern side of Herlaug's tomb. The side away from the old buried entrance.

The hole grew deeper, first a trench and then a tunnel. Then the picks grated on masonry, there was the thud of falling stones. The thralls came out pell-mell, followed by a rushing blast of dank-smelling air.

Ragnar called Turi. "You have my orders. Go now! You are the leader, and must see that thralls act like warriors tonight."

He held the torch in the tunnel, for long minutes watched it dwindle and

burn bright again. The air was not too foul. He settled his shield on his shoulder and bared his sword.

"Do not be angry, my forefather," he said, "because I come into your howe. I am not doing it to plunder your treasure or disturb your bones, but to protect both.

"And you, Thor and Tyr, return to Norway for a little while! Help us to punish the breakers of Herlaug's peace!"

He stooped through the black gap, his five carls behind him, and lifted the flaring torch. The light went flickering down the length of a great, dim room.

It glimmered on an oaken table, a feast-board covered with drinking horns, bowls and platters. Everything dusty, black with age. At the farther end was a huge, carved chair, and a hulking figure in it. Ranged on both sides were other motionless things; strangely lifelike, yet a long time dead. King Herlaug and his old warriors.

The king had been a big man, and his body still held together. The gray beard still clung to the fleshless face, the teeth gleaming through it. His eye-sockets were two staring caverns. He wore helmet and armor, crusted with rust. Shield and sword hung beside him.

His dead berserks were leaning drunkenly against the board or sprawling at length on the benches. Some of their bones had fallen and been scattered, a few were headless. But most were whole, skeletons held up by garments of rotten leather and the rust of mail.

At one side a chest of cast and hammered lead rested on warped timber trestles. The treasure hoard.

Ragnar broke the two hundred years' silence. "Greetings and health, King Herlaug! Give us welcome and seats at your feast!"

Behind him his men gaped and blinked. "Health, King! Health, berserks!" they chanted. And in that wavering light the skeletons seemed to nod back and move their jaws.

They found places on the benches, careful not to jostle the bony frames beside them, Ragnar sat at the old king's right. He still held the torch, and suddenly lifted something from the board. Something that shone in his hand.

"An arm-ring!" he said joyfully. "A gold arm-ring! Now I know that my forefather welcomes and thanks me. He gives me a gift!"

An awed murmur went around the board. "King Herlaug shows his friendship!" The men raised dusty cups and horns, pretending to pledge the dead. Ragnar clipped the ring on his arm and put out the torch.

Silence again. Silence and solid blackness. He listened with strained senses while the dark pressed on his eyes. There was nothing to hear but the steady throb of his own blood. Yet he could almost think the skeletons were moving around him. It was a good thing that they were friendly, he told himself.

Time passed slowly. The stagnant air grew thicker and thicker in his nostrils. He caught himself nodding, his senses dulling. One of the men was breathing heavily. Another shifted on his seat, with a faint click of metal. Then, at last, the waiting ended.

There were sounds of scraping, of dull thumping. From above, from outside. Ragnar sat up, alive and alert. The robbers were at the earth-blocked entrance.

The sounds grew louder, nearer. Stones and earth tumbled in through the low doorway. A red gleam stabbed the darkness, and an armed figure came crouching through the breach. It came slowly and cautiously, poking ahead with a spiked axe.

Two more followed, holding brands of flaming pine-root. They peered around, the light playing on helms, mail and naked weapons.

Helgi the Hard, big and brown-bearded. Skag with his hanging jowls, and Skiold with his bony, flax-matted face. Behind them, one after another, came their men. Twelve wolfish shipmen in sea-stained leather and iron. Others, evidently, were left to stand guard above.

In spite of numbers, armor and arms, they were not too confident. They stood crowded together and for a little while did nothing but stare. The lifted torches glistened in their eyes, showed their hairy faces shining with sweat.

They muttered and pointed. The flares threw uncertain light and shadow.

They could make out the board and the dark shapes around it. They could not see that some of those motionless things were living men.

HELGI broke the spell. He turned and thrust his torch into a crevice in the wall. Skag and Skiold did the same. They left the brands sputtering and flaming in a row, and the three leaders stepped nearer to the board, watchful and tense.

All three saw the treasure chest at the same instant. They started for it, jostling each other, greedy hands out.

That was Ragnar's moment. He rose, shouting, and swung his sword with his whole strength. Skag's helmeted head thudded on the leaden chest and rolled to the floor. His trunk swayed and then lurched down with a heavy clash.

The five housecarls were jumping over the benches. They raised a sudden deafening war-cry, "Thor and Tyr!"

It was as if the dead had all sprung up to fight. The robbers made a hoarse, moaning sound and went stumbling away. Back, still back, against the farthest wall. There they huddled, turning sweat-streaked faces and rolling eyeballs, thrusting out unsteady weapons.

Ragnar had taken Skiold by his flaxen beard; but he screamed and tore away, losing a handful of hair. Ragnar wheeled, and Helgi pushed up his shield. The falling blade bit into the shield's edge, stuck there. Helgi struck twice. His axe turned on the top of Ragnar's helm.

"A ghost is hard to slay!" he groaned, and flung the axe up again. Ragnar wrenched and twisted. The shield cracked, the sword came free. And then Helgi's helmet flew off, his forehead split redly from side to side.

The stone hall was full of struggle and din. Wild figures raging in the smoky glare, reeling through the shadows. Steel clanging as if a dozen smiths were at work. The housecarls bellowing as they hacked and hammered.

"Thor and Tyr! We revenge you, King!"

Tring—a good axe-man—smashed an iron cap, sheared an arm clean off and sliced through a shoulder. His third victim gashed his thigh, but died in the act. Alf and Tord chopped away like wood-cutters. Havtor and Bruki used swords, dripping from point to hilt.

Ragnar looked for Skiold, saw him hiding behind the chest. No fight left in him. He ran, hugging the wall and dodging blows. There was a shower of sparks, a burst of smoke. He had blundered against the row of torches and knocked them down.

Baffled by sudden darkness, Ragnar struck out blindly. His sword whistled through air. Next moment he stumbled over stones and earth, fell on his knees. He was at the open doorway; and Skiold had crawled through it.

He heard the sea-wolf shrieking to the guards above. "Hide yourselves! The dead have come to life! The Old Gods are angry!"

He thrust himself through the burrow. There were new sounds as he came out into the gray of early morning. Turi was obeying orders. He had been hiding in the bushes with the other thralls, and now they were throwing spears into the rout.

Ragnar's carls boiled out of the trench behind him. Four of them—only Tring was missing.

"It's over, down below," Alf puffed.

"Here too, I think," Ragnar answered. He called the thralls.

They found one of the robbers lying dead with a spear through him. Then two wounded, and the thralls finished them. The rest had scattered.

"Let them go," said Ragnar. But we must catch and punish Skiold!"

They did not catch him. They sighted him once, far ahead, climbing a spur of rock. They tracked him through the woods beyond. At last, with heaving chests and tired legs, they plunged down a steep path to the fiord.

He was standing on a waterlapped ledge. Helmless, his flaxen beard whipping in the sea-wind. His sword was gone. So was his mind.

"Thor and Tyr!" boomed Ragnar, and came down the hillside with a rattle of loose stones. Skiold looked back and jabbered crazily, his hairy mouth wide open. Then he waved his bony arms and dived into deep water. His mail was heavy. He did not come up.

THE sun was shining when Ragnar and his men reached the mound again. The two tunnels let a little light into the tomb chamber, but scarcely enough. The torches were rekindled.

Old Tring had strapped his gashed thigh with a belt and was resting comfortably against a corpse. They helped him into fresh air, then counted the fallen robbers. Fourteen lay sprawled and tumbled on the stone floor. The carls looked them over; and wherever they saw a sign of life they struck again.

Ragnar lifted his torch over the ancient dead on one side, the recent dead on the other. "Your enemies lie before you, King Herlaug," he said. "Live well in Valhalla!"

He turned to go. And as he moved, the great leaden chest moved too. It slid from its time-weakened trestles, crashed to the stone floor. The lid burst open and the hoard spilled out at his feet.

For a long minute he stood and looked at the shining heap, the plunder of viking raids. At silver vessels from English churches, brooches and collars of Irish gold. At rings, chains and girdles, coined money from the Southlands. His conviction grew. There was no doubt, could be no mistake. It was meant for him.

He loosed his breath in a roar of thanks. "Wealth-giver! Open-handed king! I accept your bounty, and in return will always protect your bones!"

The carls threw the treasure back into the chest, their blood-caked hands shaking as they raked up silver and gold. They dragged the clumsy coffer out into daylight, and sang as they heaved.

Ragnar beckoned to Turi. "One more task, freedman. The howe must be closed again, sealed forever."

He left the thralls busy and joined the group around the leaden box. "Helgi the Hard was right," he laughed. "I found luck here, while he got his bane."

Tring hobbled to a seat on the chest. "Of course! When the gods are around, people are apt to get their deserts. I can tell you something!

"It came to me as I lay there in the darkness. I think the old king spoke it in my ear! Your troubles are over. No more shall you be called the Unlucky; but your name shall be Ragnar Goldring, and you will be fortunate from this time on."

Ragnar smiled as he listened. The others gaped in astonishment, then they shut their mouths and all nodded gravely. Alf said, "That will come true!"

Ragnar stretched his red-spattered arms. "The Old Gods and the New may be enemies, as the priests say. Yet I think they join in helping a man who does good work."

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ILLUSTRATED BY LYNN BOGUE HUNT

The squirrels took particular delight in his predicament.

NIGHT WINGS

By TOM ROAN

THERE was no true sense of fair play when the battle started. Underneath it all was probably a rampage of spring fever let loose upon him with as little warning as possible. He was sound asleep on his favorite perch in the lone pine in that particular part of the bottomlands along the western bank of the lower Alabama River. An all-night hunt had brought him no rewards for his hours of flying. As an owl would, he had returned to his usual perch when dawn streaked the sky.

He looked fat and smug enough when the squirrels spotted him. It was a small army of them, warmed by the bright light from the sun that had swung up across the river a few hours before. Buds were coming to the limbs of the trees, and in playful scattering and romping the squirrels were leaping from limb to limb or dropping down here and there

to chase each other on the ground.

The old owl slept on until his keen ears caught the sounds of small claws scratching on the bark of his pine. Blinded by the bright daylight he could not see anything very far away, but he knew that danger was upon him when the squirrels reached his limb.

It was like the blind diving off into space when he left the limb. With an ungainly flapping he went downward, eyes blinking for a place to land. A limb caught the tips of his wings. He was upset in the air and came floundering and smashing down through the light brush to find himself on the ground.

THE squirrels took particular delight in his predicament. A feud of long standing existed between them and all owls or other birds. It was a two-sided argument. Birds of prey sometimes did pick up a young squirrel, but squirrels were also robbers of nests and destroyers of eggs and young where they could be found. Usually it was just for the deviltry of it, but they were earnestly bent now in giving the owl a drubbing for his life.

Squirrels on the ground were into it at once while those that had gone up the tree were scampering back down to take part in the onslaught. The owl knew what he was in for and wanted no part of the fight if he could get himself out of it.

The brush was like a huge net. He rose several times to try to take to the air, but the limbs slapped him back. With a dozen squirrels hot behind him he reached a place where the blinding brightness overhead told him there was an opening. He went up with a great flapping. Something loomed in front of him. With difficulty he alighted on the dead limb of an old windfall, and at once became the victim of an attack that poured upon him from all directions.

He could have escaped easily, and quickly enough by simply taking wing across the river, but an owl is not the wise old bird he is so often pictured. Stupid and lazy, he dreaded the light and clung to the shadows when there were shadows to find. The squirrels kept up their chase, barking and growling, and sometimes turning to fight or frolic among themselves. He went back to the pine innumerable times, and each time the squirrels routed him and sent him slowly flapping away, blindly and wearily trying to find another perch.

It was a great exhibition of concentrated bluff on the part of the squirrels. They had the advantage of sharper wits. Each could be a mean little fighter when forced to it, but only in pairs or more were they daring enough to actually try to come to grips with the owl. Had they been attacking a jaybird or a crow the positions would soon have been reversed. Jay or crow would have set up a squawking for help, and other jays or crows would shortly have hastened to the fight to put the squirrels to their heels.

But the old owl had a one-track mind —and the lone pine tree stood in the middle of it. It was his roost, his rightful home even if it was no more than the stub of a dead limb worn smooth on top and claw-scratched on the sides by the daily perch of his feet. Up and down the river were thousands of pines, regular forests of them where the shadows were thicker and the limbs of other trees made far better shields from the cold winds and the rains. In those forests there was only an occasional oak, hickory, chestnut or chinkapin, and the absence of those trees would mean an absence of nuts to be gathered in the fall. The annoying squirrels would have shunned it, but home was home even to a hoot-owl. He was sticking to his premises.

It was an all-day struggle, broken by intervals of an hour or two when the squirrels took themselves off to their holes in the trees to rest for the next attack. When nightfall came the owl was sticking to position within a circle fairly close to his pine. As the shadows fell and the squirrels retired he returned to his perch, a worn-out old bird but still the landlord of his broken limb. After a long sleep and a good rest the darkness sharpened his wits.

HE CAME broad-flapping out of the timber just before midnight, still the slow, unwieldy old bird looking for that long-delayed supper as he headed up the river

in the cold moonlight. As a great owl of the river bottoms would, he continued to favor the shadows. His eyes were keen as razors now as they watched the darkness, and turning at last to the east bank of the stream he bore himself heavily upward and came to rest on the high limb of a dead water oak overlooking a field where fish scales of frost lay on the half-frozen ground among the barren cornstalks.

Mice were usually to be found in a field, but cold nights when the moon was bright made them wary and as quick as shadows. He watched for a long time, then came flapping off the limb to take several turns up and down the field. Not many farmers recognized him as a true friend who killed rodents, small snakes and insects for them while they were fast asleep.

But the field seemed to be barren of mice tonight, and he turned back down the river to search other fields for a mile on either side of it.

He was disgusted when he alighted on a sycamore snag in the edge of the lowlands. He sent out a long-drawn "*Ow-oo-oo-oot!*" It went up and down the river like a shudder of mocking laughter.

In the far distance a barnyard cock crowed. He shook himself, tufted little ears pricking up. Other cocks were crowing now. The sounds came from many farms up and down the river. He listened, big round eyes staring, his body as still as the snag itself.

Something finally moved on the ground below him. He was as alert as a cocked gun the moment he discovered that fleeting shadow of something stirring, but he did not move. It was a rabbit down there. The sight sharpened his appetite. His eyes cocked themselves to the moon, then back to the ground. He never came down on his prey with the moonlight directly behind him. Such a dive would only cast his shadow before him and give his intended victim warning enough to permit escape.

He waited with an owl's patience, and it was a patience that could keep him absolutely still for hours at a time. The moon was just right for the sudden plunge. It would throw his shadow behind him as he came down, but brush barred the way for a few moments, and the rabbit, unaware of the danger, was taking its own good time about moving on. It paused in innumerable spots, squatting for long intervals and keeping as still as the intently watching owl.

The plunge was faster than it looked when it did come. The rabbit had moved out into a little opening. Without a sound the owl left the snag. When he was eight feet from his target he emitted a terrific squall. A paralyzed squeak came from the rabbit. Out of the corners of his eyes the owl saw it make one half-hearted leap before a bob-tailed flash of mottled lightning came out of the brush to seize it by the back of the neck and kill it with one savage stroke.

It was a big female wildcat, back arched, stub of tail erect, her one good right eye a slitted little ball of hateful yellow fire as she watched the owl swing up with a broad sweep of his wings. He had not been a second too soon, and had the wildcat been a trifle smarter she might have had both owl and rabbit for her dinner when the old bird started to devour his catch on the ground. The cat appeared to realize the mistake. She stood with the rabbit in her mouth, growling and snarling as she studied the owl on the snag.

"*Ow-oo-oo-oot!*" complained the owl, popping his bill viciously but thoroughly helpless to remedy the situation. "*Oot-oot-hoo-hoo!*"

In his day-blinded fight with the squirrels he had recognized several of them as old enemies, and now with his eyes made keen by the night he recognized the wildcat. It was old One Eye, the she-rake of the river, a menace to her own kind as well as to all the rest of the wild life with which she could bring herself into contact. Her muzzle was a mass of scars, picked up in scores of battles and brawls, one of which had left her without an eye.

The owl had met this fighting streak of lightning a number of times. She was always appearing at an unexpected moment. He had sat on limbs and watched her fight with other wildcats up and down the river. Once he had watched her whip a pair of half-grown hounds in

The fighting cats were three yards away when the tom scooped the rabbit up on the fly.

the moonlight, an in-and-out fighter ripping and tearing with fang and claw until both dogs were cut to ribbons and forced to make a headlong dash for the river to escape her terrible fury.

ONE EYE was even now trying to inveigle the owl to come down from his perch. She dropped the rabbit and backed three yards away from it, daring him with the tempting bait. He popped his bill at her and ruffled his feathers, but he was not the fool she was hoping she might make of him. Not for forty rabbits would he have deserted the snag to come down and face that foe.

Besides, the owl had already seen another skulking shadow sneaking to the scene. It was a second wildcat easing through the brush with the wind in its favor. Like the first cat it was a female, a lithe and tawny beast with the smell of the rabbit's blood in her nose.

There would be trouble now, and the owl waited to see it through. It was not long in coming. The second cat was in the little clearing with one long, gliding leap. She reached down to seize the rabbit, and the war was on.

One Eye let go one squall of outraged dignity. She went forward, faster than a falling limb in a gale, and the two cats were together, tooth and claw, and grimly bent to fight it out on a yard of ground.

It was not a pretty sight even for an owl, yet there was a faint, instinctive hope in his old head that he might yet profit from the affair before the bloody mess was done.

The cats were down and up. They rolled back and forth across the clearing, each fighting for the death hold. Their feet were as busy as their fangs. Gripping with the forefeet they were trying to slash each other's belly out with downward-driving strokes of their hind claws while the owl polished his bill on the snag and gave them a choice "*Ow-oot-oot*" now and then as if encouraging both cats to do their worst.

Had he been hawk or eagle, on two occasions, he might have stolen the rabbit in a quick swoop when the rolling and fighting cats smashed in and out of the brush. But he was neither as quick nor as daring as an eagle or a hawk. He waited patiently still hoping for the best.

It must have been the noise of the fight that brought the third contestant to the scene. He was a big, rough-coated old tom, meaner looking than a moccasin shedding his skin. As any wildcat would, he came up with his nose to the wind. One eye was on the rabbit and the other on the fight. He dropped flat on his belly at the edge of the brush, a greedy old rogue awaiting his opportunity. He licked his battle-scarred chops in anticipation of the bones his jaws would crush and the toothsome meat he would swallow.

When the tom flashed into it he was as sure of his target as a bullet from a gun. The fighting cats were three yards away from the rabbit and wound together in a single ball of fighting fury with the fur and hide flying. The tom did not stop. He scooped up the rabbit on the fly. With a crash he was gone in the brush.

One Eye and the cat she was fighting saw the unspeakable business from the corners of their eyes. They flung apart and came up squalling at the outrage. In ferocious leaps they shot forward, hot on the trail of the tom.

"*Oot-oo-oot-oot!*" chuckled the owl, spreading his wings. "*Ow-oo-oo-hoo-hoo!*"

A SHADOW made him dodge as he took the air. Another shape was coming down from the sky. It was a large female owl that had silently been watching the cat fight from a higher snag back there in the darkness. She popped her bill at the old owl as they almost collided in mid-air, then, careening apart, they were following the squalling cats, each hoping to somehow benefit by the fight.

The tom was running for his life. The two fight-hot she-cats kept right on after him, their fierce battle momentarily forgotten. They sped on, the brush popping and crashing. The tom was heading for higher ground. He took a couple of tumbles in the brush, yet he still held on to the prize, a grimly determined old reprobate not quite so sure of his loot now but going to fight until he died for it.

It sounded like a hurricane in the lowlands. The tom reached the rim of a low line of bluffs cut into the side of a ridge by thousands of years of spring floods of the river. He turned in a downstream direction with the rim of the bluffs growing higher.

The owls followed the chase, great wings flailing and pounding the air with laborious blows. Having come together only a few moments before it was now as if they had hunted side by side for years. In the air they were safe enough from anything the cats would like to do to them, and they were there when the first tragedy happened.

It was the two-eyed female that downed the tom. She flashed in from the right, delivering a shoulder-shot with all her weight and fury behind her blow. It caught the tom just right. He went over like a flying bag side-slapped by a violent gust of wind. Both cats fell from the sudden impact of the shock. The rabbit slipped from the tom's mouth for the first time.

It was One Eye who reaped the benefit. The leading cats had taken a rolling tumble. It was only a bouncing blur of movement, instant-long before they could right themselves, but One Eye was there to scoop up the rabbit and sweep on with it.

At once the fight between the tom and the two-eyed female had been forgotten for the moment, but it would be instantly resumed with all its fierceness the moment the rabbit again changed mouths. Venting squalls of abuse at One Eye they kept after her.

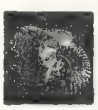
One Eye, having gained the lead, was doing her best to keep it and lengthen the distance between them. She kept to the rim of the bluffs with the owls pounding along above the din. The bluffs kept getting higher. One Eye was making for one particular spot. She entered a low pine thicket. Ahead of her soon loomed a monstrous old oak snag covered with dead vines and Spanish moss.

It was a nice jump. One Eye took it like a charger, flying out into space. It was at a deep break in the rocks, and once up the snag the she-cat could rake the faces of her pursuers as they tried to climb up to her. Had the jump been short of its mark the cat would have suffered a fall of more than forty feet, but she made her leap neatly, and it was that very neatness along with her blind side that was her undoing.

One Eye saw only the main arm of the ancient stub of limb for which she was leaping. She did not see that more of the limb had broken off since she had last visited the snag, and, worst of all, she did not notice the long splinter, sharp and hard as a sword. It was pointed straight for her belly. She struck it squarely, and let go one frantic squall of terror and pain as the long splinter drove through her.

The following cats saw the rabbit drop, and it was the tom that led the swing-back to a place where they could go down to the foot of the snag. He got there scarcely a yard ahead of the flying she-cat, and once more the prize was in his mouth. Growling and spitting, the female yowling behind him, he headed back toward the river.

It befuddled the owls. They circled the snag slowly, then alighted on a high spur of a limb. Below them One Eye hung limply, like something high-held and half-covered with vines on the tine of a fork. The cat was not moving a muscle. She had not moved after her one convulsive quick shudder. The tom and the two-eyed female were far away by this time and the noise of their fight died in the distance.



THE old owl went down twice to investigate. The smell of the dripping blood from the dead One Eye finally gave him the courage to settle on a fork of the limb. He sat there blinking, ready to flop off the limb and wheel away if the cat moved. At last, knowing that the cat was dead, he made a quick hop over to the carcass. The meat was still hot. He billed into it, managed to tear out a chunk, and swallowed it greedily.

Now the second owl came down. He popped his bill at her, but there was no real menace in his popping. Soon the she-owl was facing him and billing in. Barring tragedy there was enough meat here to last them both for several long nights of feeding together.

ONE MAN'S FLEET

A FACT STORY

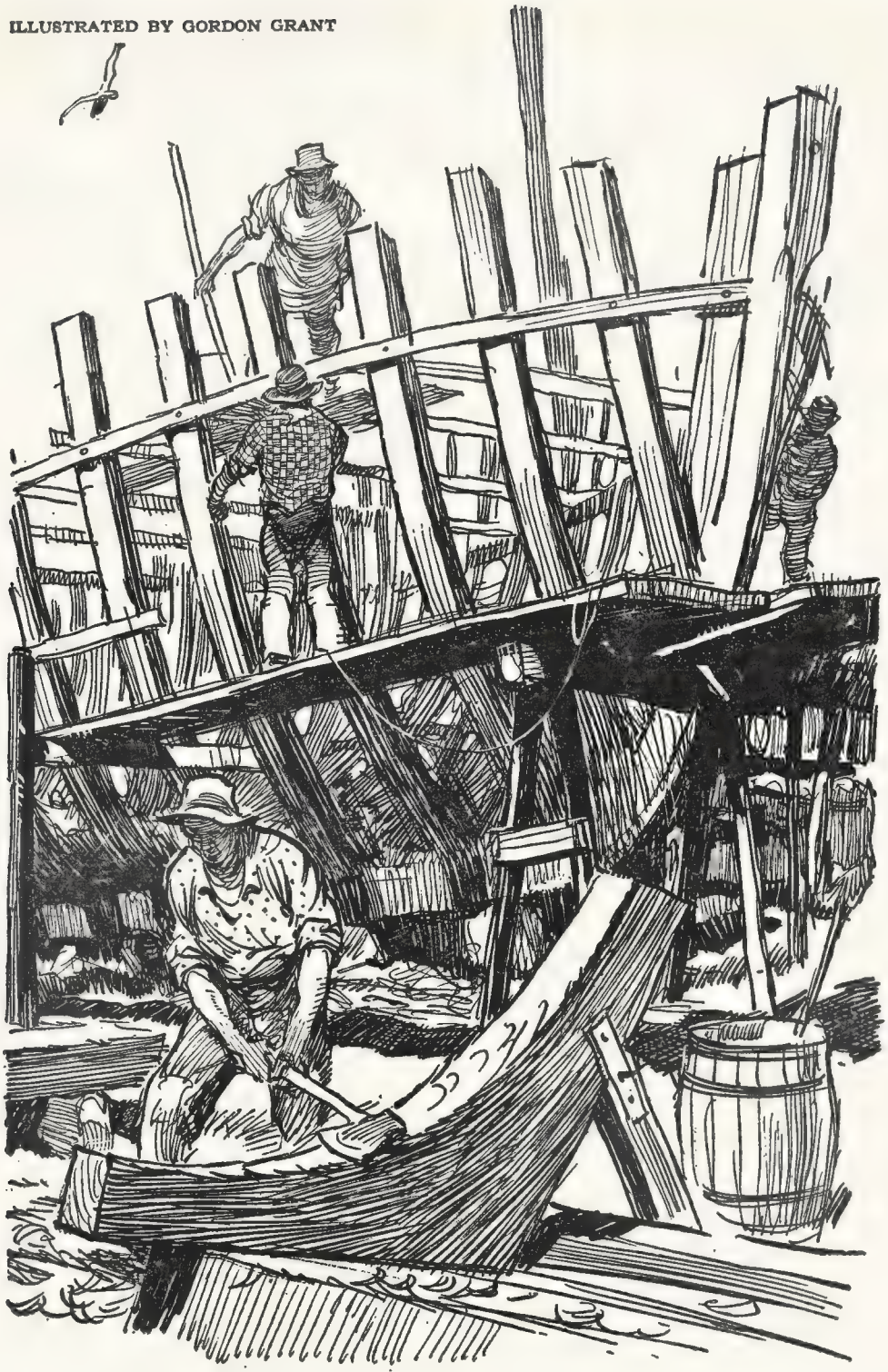
By CHARLES J. DUTTON

THE chances are you have never heard his name. Those broadcasts, which try to recreate the courage and glories of our nation's past, never mention him. The actors who quote with so much fervor Oliver Hazard Perry's famous phrase (and incidentally always leave out the last half of it) never speak of Captain Daniel Dobbins. Yet, if it had not been for him, there would have been no words of Perry to quote, no battle or victory upon Lake Erie. For Daniel Dobbins was the one man responsible for building the fleet which won the victory, yet by some odd irony, he himself had no part in the battle.

Daniel Dobbins came to Erie in July of 1796. It was then the last outpost of civilization. To the west were trackless forests filled with Indians and sel-

Trees which were standing in the early morning were planks by noon. . . .

ILLUSTRATED BY GORDON GRANT



. . . and by night they had become part of a ship.

dom traveled by white men. Erie, known to the French as Presque Isle, had once been an important trading post. It was the beginning of the trade route once used by the French to what is now Pittsburgh. What made it of great importance was its land-locked harbor, the finest upon the Great Lakes.

When Dobbins arrived in the hamlet there were but four houses, of which two were taverns, and not more than twenty inhabitants. The rude shacks hugged the mouth of a little creek which ran into the bay. Around them were the deep forests, filled with panthers, bears and wolves, and what was far worse, Indians. It was the end of civilization in what was then America.

Why Dobbins remained in this dismal spot is not known, though one may guess it was the lake which fascinated him. He was to be a sailor all his life, the greater part of his years spent upon inland waters. Perhaps he had a vision of the westward expanse of the country, for Daniel Dobbins was a man of vision. Later events proved that.

THOUGH in 1796 Erie was only an unknown speck upon the map, yet it was still an important trading post. Salt came across the lake and was carried overland, ten miles to Fort Le Boeuf, then floated down the narrow Allegheny to Pittsburgh (then Fort Duquesne). The town grew slowly. At the outbreak of the war in 1812 it had but three hundred inhabitants.

It is not known how Dobbins occupied himself when he first came to Erie, but four years later he was considered one of the best navigators on the lake. There were not many vessels. In fact, thirteen years later there were but eight in all on the whole lake—if one omits the six ships of the British fleet. Small sailing vessels they were, used entirely for commerce. The manifests of his cargoes (which I have seen) show them always the same. Salt was carried from Canada to Presque Isle. The return cargo was invariably whiskey from Pittsburgh, whiskey selling at only fifteen cents a gallon. These were the first cargoes, then about 1809, after he had become the owner and captain of his own schooner, the *Salina*, he began to sail up the lake to Detroit and a little beyond, for furs.

In 1811, he brought down from Mackinaw the most valuable cargo any boat upon the lake had ever carried—a quarter of a million dollars' worth of furs. There was a fort now at Detroit. Cleveland had come into being, had eight inhabitants and two houses. The British had built ships upon Lake Erie, a small fleet of four vessels first, the sight of which caused much pondering in Dobbins' mind. By 1811 he had begun to wonder at the unrest and stirrings among the Indians, was noticing that the British garrisons on the Canadian side of the lake were being strengthened and enforced. But of any coming year he knew nothing. Erie was still one of the last outposts of civilization, with scarcely any communication with the East.

On June 12th, 1812. Dobbins was at Mackinaw, taking on a cargo of furs. To his great surprise, he ran into a war. British soldiers marched upon his schooner, told him war had been declared, confiscated his cargo. There was no chance to flee. Not knowing what to do with the ship and its men, the British commander of the fort asked the crew of the *Salina* to take an oath they would not bear arms against Britain. All agreed but Dobbins. He refused. Nothing, however, seems to have been done about his refusal, and the commander of the fort then ordered him to sail his schooner and its cargo to Malden.

Malden was the headquarters of the British fleet, under Captain Barclay. Having no men to spare, *Salina* was permitted to sail without any British soldiers on board. Dobbins was thinking things over. Deciding that since he had not passed his word not to fight, and was thus not upon parole, he sailed the schooner to Detroit, the fort commanded by General Hull. The *Salina* was taken over by Hull and Dobbins promptly joined a scouting party. A few days later he was one of the thousands of men of the northwestern army whom Hull surrendered.

The surrender of Detroit is one of the

darkest pages of American history. Without firing a shot, without a struggle, Hull hauled down his flag, surrendered his thousands of soldiers to a much inferior force. When he did this, the control of the western frontier passed without a struggle into British hands. The Americans lost the West almost before the war had begun. The surrender also almost cost Dobbins his life.

THE *Salina* had been recognized and the British recalled that Dobbins had been ordered to sail her to Malden. He was promptly arrested, court martialed, told he was to be shot for violation of his parole. A parole which he truthfully declared he had never accepted. For some reason the execution was postponed for several days and he was thrown into a guard house, from which he promptly escaped.

Though he left a diary, in it he is very vague as to how he managed to escape from the guard house. That he was aided by a British friend there seems little doubt. During a terrific thunder storm he crept from the block house, reached the shore. There he hid in a water-soaked wreck which lay a short distance from the shore.

A price was set for his capture. The Indians, allies of the British, were told to bring him in—dead or alive—with the hint it might be better to kill him. In the wreck he lay for two days and nights, at times hearing the voices of the Indians as they searched the shore. The third night he stole out in the darkness, and after creeping along the shore, stumbled upon an old leaky canoe.

It was not much of a craft, and the lake is notorious for its high surf and bad storms. But it was better than nothing. In the leaky, half sinking canoe, he paddled sixty miles to the shores of what is now Sandusky. Luck was with him, for as he stumbled ashore he came upon a horse. Where it came from is a mystery, since the nearest dwellings were at Cleveland, sixty miles east. Capturing the animal, he rode into the village where, securing a good canoe, he at once set out to paddle the hundred miles to Erie.

The trip took two days. When he arrived he found General Mead there with fifty militia. Telling his experience, the general at once ordered him to go to Washington and recount the sad story of Hull's surrender. This was another difficult trip. First, over the narrow winding trail to Pittsburgh; then, turning east, over forest paths Dobbins crossed the Alleghenies, came to Harrisburg, turned south, and finally reached Washington. There he found that no one had heard a word regarding Hull's army, did not know of its disgraceful surrender. At once he went to President Madison. The story he told made the chief executive decidedly angry.

Dobbins wrote that the president walked up and down the room. From his lips flowed furious words, liberally salted with oaths. Madison would pause by a long table, pound his fist upon its surface. Then, wise enough to realize that this lake captain knew more about conditions than he, the president calmed down and asked for some advice.

He was told that unless the British fleet on Lake Erie was captured, the entire West was lost forever. How wise his remarks were Dobbins did not know. But the British strategy of the war was to cut off the West from the East, win it by the aid of the Indians, then, with the Ohio and the Mississippi rivers as boundaries, build up a great colonial empire which would reach to the Pacific.

"We must gain control of the lakes," said Madison, in the end.

"It can't be done without a fleet. You have none. To gain control you must build a fleet. Build it in the wilderness," was Dobbins' retort.

"But where?" he was asked.

Dobbins told Madison that Presque Isle (Erie) was the ideal place. The land-locked harbor offered protection. The shores were lined with oak trees which could be cut for timber. Madison listened eagerly. He knew nothing about Erie and the West. No one in Washington knew anything about them either. But he realized a fleet must be built and at once.

He told Dobbins to go back and begin the building of the ships. He was given a commission, not a high title, that of

shipping master, and furnished with the small sum of two thousand dollars. He was advised to go to New York, secure as many men as was possible. There was an assurance given that these men would be paid—later. With this vague promise, and the two thousand dollars, and a letter, Dobbins set out for New York. He was able to secure the aid of Henry Eckford, one of the greatest naval architects this nation ever had, and the well known ship builder, Noah Brown. The three set off at once for the long dangerous trip to Erie.

LOOKING back, the building of that fleet and the place that was chosen, seems to have been one of the most insane projects ever conceived. There was no lumber save the trees growing along the lake front. Every detail of the ships had to be built by hand, and with very few workmen. In the village of forty-seven houses and about three hundred people, there was not a mill or a carpenter's shop. One would have to travel hundreds of miles, over narrow trails, through dangerous, Indian-infested forests, before there would be found a pound of nails, a gallon of paint, or a single pound of copper or lead or iron. There were not even twenty saws in Erie, or a small blacksmith's shop. All cord and cloth must be brought from the East. Cannon were in Washington, tar in Kentucky, powder almost non-existent. As for money—well, Dobbins had two thousand dollars—and a promise.

But Dobbins went to work at once. There is no more glorious story in all our American history. Men went to work before the sun was up. Late at night they worked by the flickering light of oil lanterns. They had never heard of a forty hour week, nor a six hour day. Nor had it dawned upon them that they must pay dues to a union for the right to work to build these ships which were destined to defend their country. Nor did they stand about talking of their "rights." Trees which were standing in the early morning had been cut into planks by noon, by night they had become a part of a ship. So short were they for nails that at the beginning wooden pegs were used. As they toiled no one knew what would be done with these ships they were building, for Washington had suddenly forgotten they were being built.

Dobbins cut down the first tree with his own hands. It was a great black oak, almost at the water's edge. That night it had become the keel of the *Niagara*. No seasoning of the wood was possible. The fleet was to fight but one battle. If they lost, all was over; if they won, there would be no other ships against which to fight.

He had but two thousand dollars and it was many weeks before he secured more. But he went upon the theory that he had the entire United States treasury upon which to draw. The wages which were fairly high for the time, averaged about two dollars a day, and for a while simply consisted of orders which Dobbins signed. The men worked fourteen to sixteen hours a day. Men were brought from Pittsburgh. Once fifty decided to return. Dobbins, with a friend, set off in hot pursuit, found the workers in the forest, and by threats and pleas, brought them back to Erie.

The work went on despite the greatest difficulties. Winter came, the forests became trackless depths of snow. Dobbins had heard of several cannon in Pittsburgh, even managed to bring them over the narrow trails. Scouts were sent all over the countryside looking for scrap iron, bits of rope, anything that could be used. And, winter or not, the work went on. The only discordant note was injected by the militia brought over from Meadville to stand watch over the ships after midnight. They became alarmed at the darkness and silence, sneaked home. They were farmers and said they wanted to bring in their crops.

On March 28, 1813, Oliver Hazard Perry arrived in Erie to take charge. He found three fifty-ton sloops almost completed, two sloops of war, the *Lawrence* and the *Niagara*, well along toward completion. From this point on, the story becomes that of the young commander. Dobbins, however, became his right-hand man.

It was Dobbins who went to Buffalo

and hauled over the beach for a hundred miles, cannon weighing tons. It was Dobbins who followed the forest trails to Pittsburgh to secure the needed powder, iron and other material. Dobbins went everywhere.

AT LAST the fleet was completed. Why, during the long months of its building the British did not sail across the lake and destroy it, is one of those questions for which history has no answer. There never was a time, save perhaps the last few weeks, just before the ships did sail away, but what it would have been very easy for the British to have landed a force and burnt them on their own ways. But the enemy, though sailing in plain sight of the village on several occasions, made no effort to land.

On August 12, 1813, after great difficulties, the fleet was at last out of the harbor, and sailed up the lake. There were ten ships of one type or another, six of which had been built of the green wood at Erie. They were sadly undermanned, with a motley green crew. Save for those brought from Rhode Island by Perry, none had ever been on water before. No one knew how the ships would sail, nor how the bulk of the men would behave in a battle. Dobbins was now the commander of his own sloop, the *Ohio*, but he was still a sailing master, having received no promotion.

On September 10, 1813, Oliver Hazard Perry defeated for the first time in history, an entire British squadron, and saved the West for the American nation. The two fleets were of almost equal strength, perhaps the American was a trifle the stronger. The story of that battle is too well known to need many words.

How Perry, at the end of two hours, had lost his battle, how his flagship was cut to bits, her deck a shambles, are details familiar to all. How he saw the *Niagara* untouched, the ship having been kept out of the battle by the curious actions of her commander; and how Perry had himself rowed across to the *Niagara*, changed her course, and fifteen minutes later had won the battle, is equally familiar history. The tale of the battle and its victorious conclusion snatched from defeat is one of the glories of our past.

All remember, too, Perry's famous message, written upon the crown of his hat, upon the deck of his own battered *Lawrence*, and sent to General Harrison. "We have met the enemy and they are ours; two ships, two brigs, one schooner and a sloop."

But shipping master Daniel Dobbins, who had conceived and started the building of the fleet, had no part in the battle, nor saw the victory his ships had won. He had sailed for Erie with the *Ohio* a few hours before the engagement.

That fleet never fired another shot. Its work was over. Nor for that matter did Oliver Hazard Perry ever engage in another battle. His first was also his last. And Daniel Dobbins, who started the fleet never had a part in any battle of any kind, even if he did sail the lakes and later the seas for some years.

He was to be made a captain and serve in the Revenue Service. And in 1826 he was to be engaged in a task which, though sorrowful, it was felt was only fitting should be given to him. He was ordered to command the vessel which was to bring back to the States the body of his friend, Oliver Hazard Perry, who had died of yellow fever while engaged upon a mission for the nation in South America. That task over, Dobbins resigned his commission, saying he had completed a cycle, of which Perry was the center.

He was to live an active life in Erie until his death in 1856. Always he was sailing the lake he loved. He was to see the fruits of the victory. Cities were to spring up, the forest cleared, the stream of civilization was to move ever westward.

Captain Daniel Dobbins—the man whose vision caused the building of the fleet which saved the West—is a much forgotten name in the pages of American history. His story, and what he did, deserves to be dug out of obscurity. It would be a fine thing indeed if America just now had a few more like him. We could use plenty of such spirit and courage today.

ILLUSTRATED
BY
I. B. HAZELTON

He might make it back to the tank perhaps, but never to Blighty.

A QUESTION OF VALOR

By CARL CLAUSEN

THE lieutenant focused his field glasses through the slits in the conning tower of the tank. Even the powerful binoculars showed merely a slight rise, almost indistinguishable from the rest of the monotonous Libyan desert landscape. Nothing to indicate the presence, there, of a machine-gun nest and a squad or two of riflemen.

The lieutenant's tank had been struck

by a shell at dawn shortly after the squadron had got under way. The shell had crippled it beyond field repair, knocking out the radio as well. In the dust storm the squadron had gone on, following the trail of the enemy that had shelled them.

The lieutenant's disabled command had evidently not been missed.

He moved the field glasses back and forth to the limits of the slit in the conning tower. Fifty feet or so to the rear was a *wadi,* a winding scar in the desert gouged by the winter rains, but now dry. The lieutenant removed his padded crash helmet and wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

It ran in greasy rivulets down into his eyes, blinding him. He glanced querulously at the splotch on the steel floor of the tank, washed clean of desert dust by the water that had leaked from the water tank that had been punctured by a piece of shrapnel.

He ran his tongue along his parched lips at the thought of a drink—any sort of drink. He glanced at his wrist watch. That had been at seven A. M. It was now almost five P. M.

Ten hours without a drop to drink and the thermometer at one hundred and ten, plus.

The wounded driver on the floor opened his swollen lips. No sound came from them, but the lieutenant did not have to be a lip-reader to know that the word the man tried to form was "water."

The driver was badly but not fatally wounded. If they could keep his fever from mounting he'd come through all right. The cool night air and water—not only to drink but to dress his wound again, and to bathe his temples—was imperative.

The gunner said: " 'E's a bit out of 'is 'ead, sir."

The lieutenant frowned. He remembered what he had seen, or thought he had seen, as the tank bucked the steep bank of the *wadi,* half a minute before the shell struck. It had been merely a flash in the sun-drenched dawn a little to the right of the crossing—upstream—a tiny pool no larger than a handkerchief.

And he had seen so many of these, large and small, all over—mirages made by the shimmering heat—that he had not looked again.

And, yet, if there were not some sort of spring nearby, why had the enemy posted a patrol in the particular spot? It seemed reasonable.

He sighed, sucking in a draft of oven-like air that almost scorched his aching lungs.

In the west the sun was setting in a final burst of red and orange fire. Darkness came swiftly in Libya, and there'd be no moon.

He would never find that tiny handkerchief-sized pool in the dark.

"Hand me that bucket," he told the gunner.

The man stared at the metal pail on its hook under the wrecked water tank. His hairy hand moved toward it, then paused in mid-air.

"The—what, sir?" he asked incredulously.

The lieutenant nodded. The gunner's hand completed the gesture.

He lifted the pail off the hook and peered in it as if he suspected that the lieutenant had been holding out on him—that a drop or two might have been caught there, perhaps, from the leak in the tank.

He shook his head, tilted the pail for the other to see.

The lieutenant took it from the man's hand.

"Listen carefully," he told the gunner, thickly. "There are sometimes damp spots in these *wadis* where a little digging—" He didn't want to raise any false hopes. "You'll cover me with the machine gun to distract their attention. Keep firing until I'm over the bank of the *wadi.* Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"When I'm ready to return I'll throw a stone. Watch for it and start firing again to cover me."

"Right, sir."

The gunner straddled the gun seat and took aim. The lieutenant put on his steel helmet and at the first chatter dropped on the ground behind the tank and with his arm hooked through the handle of the pail began to work himself

along the ground on his belly toward the *wadi,* keeping his face turned away from the enemy trench.

FOOT by foot he worked himself forward across the exposed terrain. An outcrop of rock, mere inches higher than the thin soil became an important shelter for brief seconds; a declivity or a stunted tussock of desert growth, a haven.

The hot rays of the sun beat down on him, probing with pitiless fingers for the last drop of moisture in his aching body. As he dragged himself along, he thought: *They'll see me any minute, now.*

Behind him he heard the answering rattle of the enemy's machine gun, and the *ping* and whine of the bullets striking the tank and ricocheting. Tiny fragments of metal swished in the tussock near his head, like salt from a shaker. One of the dried stalks was sheared off and flung in his face. He brushed it away, drew his helmet farther over his eyes and went on.

I won't look ahead, he thought. *It won't seem so far that way.*

He passed a small clump of wilted desert flowers. As his shoulder brushed them, seeds fell in a gentle shower from the dry pods. Next spring they'd burst into bloom, painting that little spot of desert for their brief hour in magenta and gold.

He closed his eyes and then—his clawing hands touched nothing. The ground fell away under them and he slid down the steep bank to the bottom of the shallow *wadi.*

He raised himself on his elbow. The pool of water—or mirage—was still there, but much farther up-stream than he'd thought. Crawling on hands and knees was faster than dragging himself on his belly.

The noisy chatter of the machine guns had stopped, so the gunner must have observed him sliding over the bank. Dependable bloke, that gunner. No wasting of ammunition.

The pool appeared all of two hundred yards distant. It worried him to see it widen and spread as he drew near. He paused and stared at it angrily. All right, turn into a lake and evaporate! Have it over with! He stalked it warily, closing his eyes and opening them again, but it was still there, getting wider until it spread almost from bank to bank.

When he was within a few feet he stopped, and crouched there.

Well, what am I waiting for? Can't take it? The Hell I can't! Knew bloody well it was a mirage all the time!

He moved forward a little and reached out his hand and touched its shimmering surface. Withdrawing it he inspected the fingertips, then put them to his lips, one by one, and ran his tongue along them.

The next moment he had buried his face in the pool. *Easy, now! Three swallows—well, four, then, but no more. In half an hour or so, you can have all you want.*

He immersed the pail carefully so as not to muddy the water, then placed it brimful on the shingle beside him. He plunged his arms into the pool to the elbows and ladled water over his burning neck and shoulders. For a minute or two he remained supine with his arms buried to the shoulders, letting his body soak up moisture.

Then he started back on hands and knees, moving the pail a few feet at a time until he reached the bank opposite the tank again. He looked around for a pebble to throw. He was very particular about its size and shape. He rolled one after another in his palm, then selected one.

There's no hurry, he told himself. *You're not going to get back, you know.* He might make it to the tank, perhaps—a man can be hit half a dozen times and still make fifty feet—but not back to Blighty. Carrying a full pail of water is something else again from dragging an empty one along the ground on your belly.

He must remember to steel himself against the impact as the bullets struck. He tightened his belt a notch. It was important to remain rigid. In the old days, the Malays used to lace themselves tight in leather armor before charging the enemy. He *had* to make it. The wounded driver must live to drive and

repair another tank. Good mechanics couldn't be spared. There weren't enough to go around as it was.

He raised himself on his elbow and threw the stone, waited until he heard the machine gun begin chattering and the answering crackle from the enemy trench, then he took a firm hold on the handle of the pail, dug his boots into the gravelly bank and went over the top.

BENT almost double to offer as small a target as possible, he hurried toward the tank. The pail, a five-gallon one, weighed as if filled with lead. He was barely over the bank when the enemy observed him.

Suddenly little puffs of sand burst like cotton-flowers into bloom all about his feet, and bullets droned and whined past his ears like angry bees.

Water splashed on his dusty boots, so he slackened his pace a little. The pail became a monstrous weight chained to his right wrist until his arm seemed about to be torn from its socket. *That'll be a bullet in my shoulder,* he thought, *but if I try to shift the pail to the other hand, I'll spill more.*

So, he kept going. Running half-crouched, the heavy pail almost dragged him on his face. As he stumbled into the shelter of the tank a deflected bullet seared his cheek.

The gunner dragged him through the steel door.

"Careful—you'll spill it!" the lieutenant admonished sharply.

The gunner sighed.

"Begging your pardon, sir. The bucket was shot full of 'oles the minute you showed your 'ead over the bank. I saw the water run out. I was wondering why you didn't drop it. It made a fair target—flashing in the sun." He jerked his thumb over his shoulder. "The colonel must have missed us, sir. One of our 'eavy tanks's comin' up."

The lieutenant stared at the cloud of dust in the teeth of the angry sunset, then back at the pail in the gunner's hand. It was like a sieve. He felt his shoulder. There was no longer any pain there.

The small trickle of blood was from his cheek where the machine-gun bullet had grazed it.

Then the lieutenant knew what had made the empty pail so heavy. Fear—the leaden thing that crushes men to earth.

"I Talked with God"

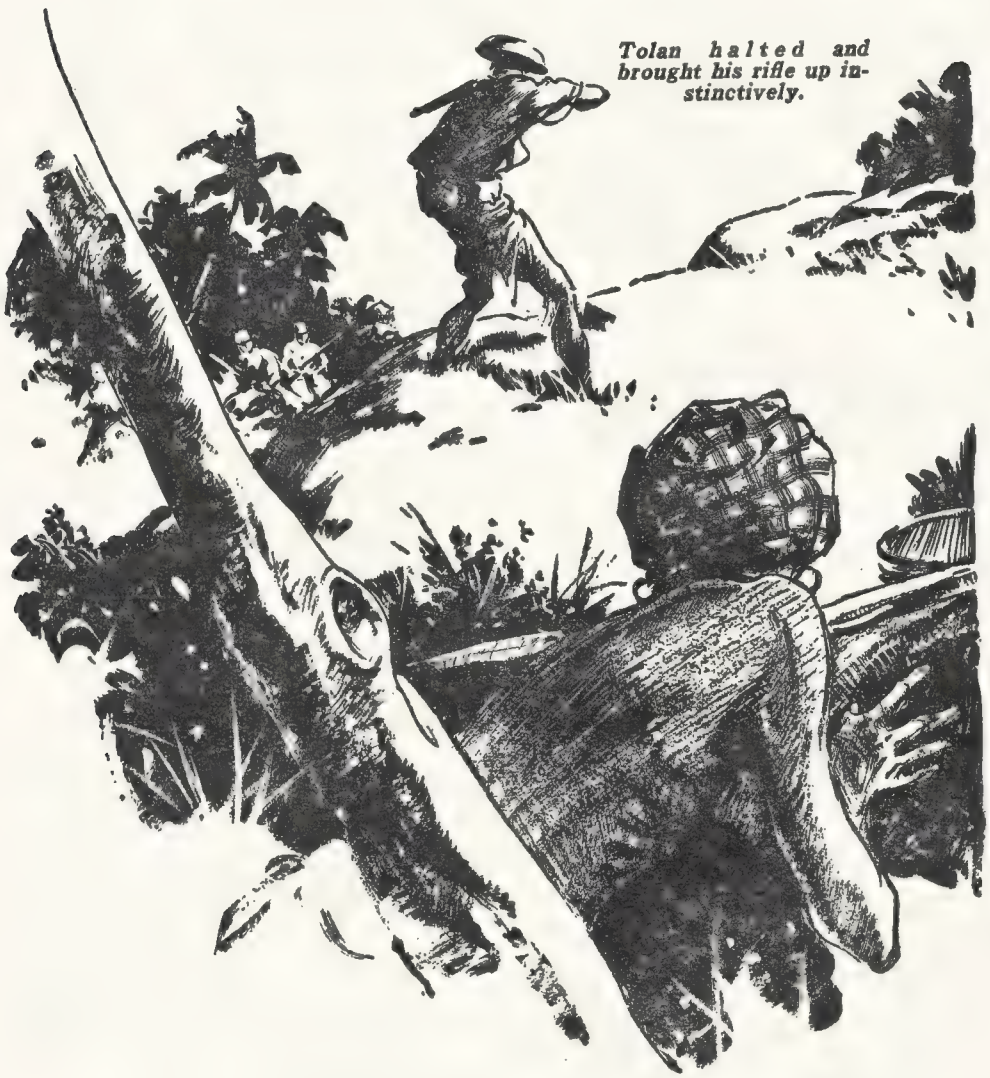
(Yes, I Did — Actually and Literally)

and as a result of that little talk with God a strange Power came into my life. After 42 years of horrible, dismal, sickening failure, everything took on a brighter hue. It's fascinating to talk with God, and it can be done very easily once you learn the secret. And when you do—well—there will come into your life the same dynamic Power which came into mine. The shackles of defeat which bound me for years went a-shimmering—and—now—? —well, I own control of the largest daily newspaper in our County, I own the largest office building in our City, I drive a beautiful Cadillac limousine. I own my home which has a lovely pipe-organ in it, and my family are abundantly provided for after I'm gone. And all this has been made possible because one day, ten years ago, I actually and literally talked with God.

You, too, may experience that strange mystical Power which comes from talking with God, and when you do, if there is poverty, unrest, unhappiness, or ill-health in your life, well—this same God-Power is able to do for you what it did for me. No matter how useless or helpless your life seems to be—all this can be changed. For this is not a human Power I'm talking about—it's a God-Power. And there can be no limitations to the God-Power, can there? Of course not. You probably would like to know how you, too, may talk with God, so that this same Power which brought me these good things might come into your life, too. Well—just write a letter or a post-card to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 56, Moscow, Idaho, and full particulars of this strange Teaching will be sent to you free of charge. But write now—while you are in the mood. It only costs one cent to find out, and this might easily be the most profitable one cent you have ever spent. It may sound unbelievable—but it's true, or I wouldn't tell you it was.—Advt. Copyright, 1940, Frank B. Robinson.

MOUNTAIN PROMISE

By GORDON MacCREAGH



Tolan halted and brought his rifle up instinctively.

LONG TOLAN HATFIELD didn't read the newspapers. And that added just one other resemblance to fierce old Grampa Asa. Only that Grampa Asa never read a newspaper because few Tennessee hillbillies of his time could read at all. Tolan didn't read them because into these mountains of the Pegu Yoma in Burma no papers ever came.

ILLUSTRATED BY HAMILTON GREENE

So he was very much surprised when five yellow men came trampling through the jungle to his camp. Not surprised that they suddenly appeared; he had heard them coming, of course, and his trained ear had subconsciously registered them as five. But he never thought they could be any other than Shan tribesmen, and, being American—that is to say, not of the overlord British race—those hillmen had no quarrel with him.

And there when he looked up, instead of the friendly, broad-cheeked brown faces under their ridiculous floppy Floradora hats, a chunky little yellow man in a uniform grinned at him out of the close greenery with an unfamiliar looking tommy gun and four others with rifles

ran with quick efficiency to post themselves in commanding positions.

Long Tolan had the born hillbilly trait of saying nothing, making no silly move, till he had sized up the situation. He only looked at the yellow man, his long, bony face blank with those carefully incurious eyes that had the habit of attending strictly to their own business while they fiercely insisted at the same time that their business was strictly their own and nobody else's to poke a nose into.

The yellow man said without any excitement, as a matter of routine, rather —it seemed that the formula was quite familiar to him: "You are prisoner. You sit so. My men take you gun; all weapons."

LONG TOLAN, just as much as Grampa Asa and all the rest of the unruly clan, was passionately convinced of two things—that life for a healthy man was fit to live only in mountain country and, to be fit to live, a man must have his personal liberty to carry his gun and to come and go about his mountains as he willed. Hatfields long before him had killed men who had tried to curtail that liberty; and it was, in fact, a rather too passionate devotion to this personal religion of the clan that had impelled Long Tolan, one hurried day, to transfer his turbulent activities from the mountains of Tennessee to these much higher and more secluded ranges of the Pegu Yoma. Out of the corner of his eye he saw his Burman camp boys meekly hand over his rifle and pistol to the scurrying yellow soldiers.

The yellow corporal's shoulders suddenly hunched and the tommy gun poked tensely forward.

"You will sit very obedient, please." Only he made it, prease, with an r; he couldn't pronounce *l's*.

Long Tolan let his breath slowly steam from him as he looked into the cold little round muzzle. Curiously little. A .25 it looked to him; light and easy handling for a little man, but deadly enough for close jungle work. His voice showed his acceptance of the situation with an amazed disgust.

"So they let you get past Singapore, past Java, all they way to Burma?"

The yellow man grinned again. He added cheerful derision to Long Tolan's amazement at successive crumbling of British power.

"Of course. We capture those Empire places. Then we capture Moulmein, then Rangoon and," he grinned the wider, "now we capture you. All so very simple." He saw that his men had the situation in hand. "You may stand up now, please."

Long Tolan appraised the exact tenseness of the yellow corporal's shoulders and his hands on the tommy gun and its distance from himself. Much too alert and much too far for any wild leap and grab; the corporal was very efficiently familiar with the technique of taking maddened white men prisoners. He stood barely out of the jungle fringe.

Tolan said therefore: "I'm O.K. sitting as I am."

He preferred to remain sitting crosslegged on the ground because the business that had located him in these Pegu jungles was the collecting of "kalaw nuts," a seed much like the "chaulmoogra" that has been imported from those same mountains into Hawaii and is a priceless specific for leprosy; and what he had been doing when the surprise came was cracking some of these seeds with a Burmese *dah*, a weapon much like the Philippine *bolo*, and the *dah* at that moment was under his thigh.

"All so very simple, eh?" he said sourly. "Well, you wouldn't have captured me so damn simple if I'd ever a' had a notion your people were within a thousand miles. Me, nor any other good mountain man. Last news I had was Java, and, by goddamit, I thought they'd surely stop you there."

The yellow corporal's grin was complacently superior. He stiffened himself to announce his credo.

"Nothing," he fanatically spouted, "will stop the victorious advance of our Imperial Destiny."

"Yeah?" said Tolan. But the gun had not deviated from his chest. "I had a rumor that Uncle Sam was getting some of the boys in to help."

THE yellow corporal only showed teeth like a traditional *yama-doshi* mask. He didn't give the accompanying lewdly derisive answer because he was chattering to his squad. They had by now systematically rummaged through the camp; they had collected some few papers, whatever food there was, the guns. They were not interested in the Burman camp boys any more than they had been interested in local native populace throughout their campaign. It was white men they were conquering. They were ready to go.

"You will get up now, please," the corporal ordered briskly. "You will march down before my men. You will be very carefully obedient."

He chattered some orders to the men. His eyes were confidently on them, not on his prisoner.

"Ha! I'd betted"—Long Tolan grunted with his sudden effort—"you would sooner or later!" His grunt came with the heave of his shoulder as he snatched the *dah* from under his thigh and with the same underhand swing flung it. The blade made one turn in the air around its own weight and chunked diagonally into the yellow corporal's chest and face with a sound like a butcher cleaving meat.

Long Tolan rose on his tucked up legs in one immense dive; like a leopard frog for the shelter of its reeds, or rather, like a leopard. Head first he crashed into the underbrush screen and he was already rolling down the jungle-matted hillside in giant leaps and scrambles when the remaining four yellow men reached the clearing edge of his camp and sent a fury of bullets smashing blindly after the sounds of his flight.

He hugged every moist depression. Belly flat, he blessed every root, cringed his head into the dirt behind useless fern fronds at the unbelievable racket that bullets can make through nothing tougher than leaves. He was ripped, clothes, hands, face, as though he had been through a barbed wire entanglement; he wondered whether one bleeding eye might be blinded, but his fear was for a worse catastrophe. "If I only don't break me a leg or some durn thing now." That was the closest thought to prayer he had had since Maw Hatfield's knee.

Up back there he could hear the dismayed chatter of the yellow soldiers between bursts as they stopped to listen. One technique that they did not seem to be familiar with was the hunting down of a white man mad enough to dive for liberty after having been efficiently captured by five of them all at once.

He could hear the confused murmur of their babble. Too hideously close. His lips strained away from his teeth in a tensity of honest scare that never shamed his conception of mountain manhood. He could hear them now, floundering into the jungle as inexpertly as hired beaters after an animal. His lips closed over his teeth to pinch down and mutter out of one side: "Effen I but had me a gun I c'd bushwhack the hull passel of 'em all to once."

He reached his hand cautiously for a loose moss-covered rock, flung it like a hand grenade far from him and flattened himself immediately again behind his fallen tree bole. The rock bounded crashing down the slope in accelerating leaps. A frenzy of firing followed its progress. Long Tolan's lips drew away again, this time hardily grinning. Under cover of the racket he made good distance.

He could risk crawling now, rolling like a limply rotted log, snaking belly rasp over roots. The shouts of the beaters to one another were left high above; an occasional shot blasted blindly at nothing. Long Tolan's grumble was disgusted rather than triumphant.

"Damned truck farmers. Rice paddy puddlers. Think to catch a mountain man."

His eyes narrowed down to note the set of ferns and moss where the sun never came. He turned north, skirted the mountain flank to leave a wide detour of his camp, worked his way up to the ridge again. Up on the windswept divide where he had the mountaineer's sure knowledge that the man on top had all the advantages he stopped to take survey of himself and things.

Away below him the valley was a hazy mat of giant bamboo; it looked like grass

with the dew on it. He could discern no more than a man might of rats scurrying in long grass. The muffled roar of a tumbling river covered all lesser sounds. He squinted against the light at the brahminy kites wheeling at about his own level. Too many kites. He grunted to himself. He found a padouk tree, gashed its bark with a flint and smeared the oozing juice over his cuts, wincing at their smart. He broke thorns to pin a pants leg that flapped like an apron. Then he swore disgustedly at things as he surveyed them and settled down to the long hike due north that he would keep up, as he reckoned it, for a good thirty hours before he could come to the next white man—and a gun.

CHAPTER II

JUNGLE DUST

KYAUKTAW was one of a line of strategic "forts" on the cross country trail that ran all the way into Thailand. The fort might have been an American pioneer outpost in the days of Indian warfare, only that its funny little stockade was no more than a fence of pointed bamboos—a symbol, rather than a defense, of British might in a settled land where nobody ever expected as much as an Indian raid. Its purpose was to keep wandering pilferers and pi-dogs out of the government outpost that housed a half company of Gurkhas and a British subaltern. The subaltern said to Long Tolan: "My sacred aunt! Was the hide worth saving?"

"What hide?" Long Tolan could never quite understand the subtleties of British humor.

"The black leopard's you had your fight with?"

Tolan appraised the man, nodding.

"You all got anything to laugh about, you think? I just found out about it yest' aft'noon."

The subaltern sobered but remained indomitable.

"It is a blow to the old morale, what?"

"Just how bad?"

"Can't say exactly, old man. Radio's out of commish; I'm depending on heliograph and my code man's down with hill gripes. We know they've got the railroad as far as Toungoo and west of the Yoma they're pushin' up Irrawaddy Valley, hell all out for the oil fields and a break through to India."

"Hum!" Long Tolan visualized the local geography. "What's going to happen to you, you'll be trapped. Better pull out while you can still run the ridges north."

The subaltern grinned into the face of a condition about which he had no illusions. "I'd like to. But we've got to stick it bally well out; all the outposts along this line; hold the blighters up as long as we can."

Both men looked square into each other's eyes, the one already ragged and scarred, the other as yet spruce in unblooded uniform. Both knew that they were saying good-bye. It was silly to waste argument on it.

Tolan said simply: "Mighty sorry, Jack. One of the rules of a man's job, I s'pose." And he changed the subject, all unconscious that he expressed an individualist creed heretical in these times. "Well, I've managed to remain a free man all my time. So if you'll lend me the loan of some shootin' material and a meal I'll get goin'. I'll turn your gun in to the cantonment at Meiktila where I'll be able to buy me some outfit and then I'll hit on north for that new Chinee road they're building across the tiptop of Burma. Reckon that ought to remain free country for a spell yet."

The subaltern seemed to have some reason to dissuade him. "Tough country up there, old man. Chances of goin' out sticky are worse than stayin' around here."

"Likely so. But," Long Tolan restated his formula that made life worth the effort, "at least I'll remain my own boss."

The subaltern added to his reason. "I'll lend you a rifle." And he grinned thinly with the monkey wrench he threw into Tolan's confident plans. He was just as confident in his own statement. "You'll head west, my masterless chappie, not north."

"I see nothing in sight to stop me." Long Tolan was instantly belligerent.

"You'll see 'em at tiffin, old fellow—ah, here's one of 'em now, I rather fancy."

A knock, and a white man in civilian clothes came into the room. The subaltern was mischievously genial. "Mr. Grant, let me introduce Long Tolan Hatfield—a compatriot of yours."

Mr. Grant, American, did not just stand and look aloof at Tolan's unwashed raggedness with the mumbled formula of, "Oh, howd'ye do?" He came forward and shook hands genially and said, "Pleased to meet you."

"Mr. Grant and his companion," the subaltern told Tolan, "*must* get back to some safe river station. I just can't afford to detail an escort. So—you're the man to see them through."

TOLAN sized up the man, his long face set in uncompromising lines. The man was not old, not in years; but his face sagged with the weight of effete city living and his body, while not exactly fat, bulged woefully soft over his belt. Not at all a man to be found in an isolated mountain outpost.

"How'd he ever get here?" Long Tolan wondered with blunt uncompliment.

"They rode mules. But some dashed *dacoit* gang got away with the mounts. Quite a bit of sabotage going on amongst the natives, don't you know."

"Hnr-rh!" Long Tolan's contemplative noise was an unintentioned insult. "Figure on makin' it back afoot, sir?"

The subaltern took up the answer. "Now it may be that the Japs have not pushed this far into the Irrawaddy River plain country yet. I just don't know about that, though we do know that the Burman populace is quite obstreperous. But they've *got* to get through. So—" the subaltern looked squarely at Tolan. "Don't you see?"

Long Tolan scowled at the man, looking through him and beyond at the prospect of such a journey. He did see; all of it. He shook his head and directed his reply again to the subaltern.

"Plains country is purely despiteful for a man afoot—for any man. Dust shoetop deep an' scrub jungle an' the ground flat an' griddle-hot under foot, 'n then a stretch or so of *jheel* swamp an' skeeters that bite a chunk 'n take it up in a tree to eat, an' likely a tiger or so jumping your night camps; and a good two hundred miles of it between foothills and nearest river point where he'll be safe, and that'll be Thayetmyo garrison. Nossir. This'n couldn't make it. Not 'nless t'other'n might be a miracle and carry him piggy back much of the way."

"That's why," the subaltern remained confident, "you've got to see them through. Countrymen of yours and all that, don't you know."

Long Tolan ignored that. "And mind you," he shook a didactic finger at his friend, "I'm describing country as I've seen it with no Jap column swarming through and the Burman natives peaceful under the heel before they got uppish."

"And you'd meet some more Americans at Thayetmyo," the subaltern added in inducement. "Report is there's a contingent of your good old doughboys come in to help hold the line."

That last inducement finished it. Long Tolan pushed away the empty air before him, his face alarmed. "So then it's final. I'm not goin' to Thayetmyo if it was in a pullman."

The subaltern had been in the mountains long enough to ask no inquisitive questions about a man's personal reasons. But Grant, meek under his own ignoring, pushed himself into the dialogue, flushed and angry at last under Tolan's uncomplimentary appraisement.

"Look here, young man, you can cut some of this derogatory stuff right out. What have you got against your countrymen?"

TOLAN'S eyes narrowed down on the man standing so pudgily up to his own drawn wire hardness. He could have mashed him out like a slug, but there was a spiritual sturdiness about the man that was something apart from his soft body. Tolan's eyes focused frowning into some spot inside of Grant's head. His own hardihood responded to whatever it was that he saw.

"I'll get 'em through, Jack," said Long Tolan. "Mountain promise."

"All right," he said slowly. "I'll tell you. You being so urgent, maybe you got a right to know reasons. I got nothing against us. We're the finest on earth —at least, from some parts of our country and saving the presence o' Jack O'Day here. So I'll tell you reasons. I won't go to where there's any U. S. Army 'cause I deserted from it six years back. There!"

He stood back defiantly, eyes level on them and unashamed, justified in his own estimation. Both men looked at him in silence, the subaltern, military man, much more shocked than Grant at the sacrilege. Tolan conceded them a meager explanation.

"A youngster I was, bare grown and a mite over-corned up down to Gatlinburg Fair; and next thing I rightly knew, I was in a dungaree uniform with a job shuckin' about a hundred bushels o' sweet corn a day in a barracks kitchen 'cause I'd won county championship an' that's all they allowed I was good for. Till"—he breathed steamily again at the recollection—"I reckoned no fat Insky-Minski commissariat sergeant from no eastern place called Brooklyn could miscall me gratuitous the way that'n did. So—well, I stretched him cold the next time and—the folks said it would be jail and slipped me away."

Grant nodded. He could half smile at the enormity of the deed. But Jack put his hand on Tolan's sleeve to urge military religion on him.

"Old man, you've got to go back. You'll never be satisfied yourself if you don't."

"Haven't lost sleep so far," said Long Tolan, hardily unregenerate.

"And you'll take them with you. It's important—to your country as well as us." And the officer did not hesitate now to use the clinching argument. "It could be the last thing I ask you, old chap."

Long Tolan's eyes narrowed down as his friend's earnest face held him for long minutes while his lips pinched down tight and slowly let go again. Then he said: "All right. Put it that way, I'll take 'em. But not across plains to Thayetmyo. I'll take 'em mountain trails and drop down to Mandalay, or some place where they'll be safe." His narrow gaze dissected Grant. "*If* we don't have to go so slow the Jap skirmishers overhaul us." But then his teeth bit down in the old belligerence and his shoulders filled to his breath. "Aw, all right, I'll get 'em through." He was not gracious about it, only grim. "I'll give you my hand on that much."

Jack took his hand, eager, the devil-may-care laugh in his voice again.

"And then you'll go back to your duty. It's one of the rules of a whole man's job."

"I'll go right on north to the Chinee road," said Long Tolan uncompromisingly. "But I'll deliver 'em first. Mountain promise."

He spoke as though he were contracting to deliver a consignment of inert

freight. But the soldier laughed as he squeezed his hand.

INERT freight was what it practically turned out to be. The other man, Wade, was physically the perfect stooge for Grant—thin, small-boned, with pinched chest and rounded shoulders that must have stooped over a desk all his life. His weight would reduce the joint average to about a hundred and twenty pounds. He was deferential—a secretary or something, Tolan guessed. He didn't know; their relationship was their business and unless they volunteered information about themselves it was not his business to ask.

His business was to lead along the mountain trails, to make as good time as might be. Within the first two miles he stopped his, to him, agonizingly slow pace. A sort of amazement was on his face. He said: "Reckon I'd better take you uns' packs a spell till your legs get the hang o' hiking short one, long t'other."

All the pack either carried was a pair of blankets rolled over the shoulder with a few cans of bully beef. Tolan had made them up himself, holding down to the minimum that he thought any sort of man ought to carry. He arranged the extras to a nice balance on his own load of duffel, said: "O.K., let's go. Or I doubt we'll make twenty miles today."

Twenty miles! Along trails made by Shan hillmen who would without stopping to think about it drop into a seven-thousand-foot valley and up the other side just to make a short cut! Long Tolan had never been to tourist resorts, places like Yellowstone or Grand Canyon. He had never seen gay young tourists trip blithely down, for instance, Bright Angel trail to the first flat—a drop of thirty-five hundred feet—and fall exhausted a third of the way back, marooned till the hotel wrangler came down for them with saddle horses. If he had, he would have guessed ten miles. These men, while not old, were not young. They made nearly six miles. And none of them was gay.

Long Tolan made camp in a fairy spot. There was a sparkling stream, soft green grass, giant tree ferns, orchids, everything. He cooked a meal in thoughtful silence, cut mountains of fern fronds for the others' beds while they lay too played out even to be ashamed about not helping. They ate in silence. Till abruptly Tolan said: "One thing you could do. I'd take you back and Jack could maybe get his helio to blinkin' and p'raps put a relay signal through some place for mules."

Grant shook his head, stubbornly, through his weariness. "There wouldn't be time; we discussed it. The fort will be attacked any day now, and I *must* get clear. I have a report to turn in."

Long Tolan did not ask what sort of a report or how important as against the job of getting it delivered. He said: "There'll be a sight more o' this and little of it any better."

Grant closed his eyes, as though to shut out that awful fairyland scenery. "It is important," he said.

Tolan sat hugging his knees, frowning at one man then at the other. "You city fellers got your guts," he said.

CHAPTER III

HELL'S HOTEL

WITH the next sparkling mountain morning Tolan could barely get them started out of their stiffness. The day's mileage was less than a tortured four. And they wouldn't have made that much were it not for the persuasion of little crackles of sound that echoed, doubled and redoubled, from one towering ridge to another behind them, fuzzy from repetition through the blanketing trees.

"Could that be—" Grant turned haggard eyes up to Tolan; he shrank from naming the thought in his mind.

"Damn right," said Tolan grimly. "Keep steppin'."

All through the day that crackling followed them fitfully on the wind, in merry little bursts, like the paper firecrackers of a Burmese marriage festival. When towards late afternon it came no more, the two turned hopeful looks to Tolan.

"An old British custom," he told them, tight-lipped. "Too late and too little. Keep steppin'."

They made an early camp at the end of a long decline. Early because the others could go no farther. But not right there on the trail where they would have given their panting souls to have stayed. Tolan made them climb a little yet, drove them—literally, shoved them with his shoulder to their buttocks up the steep slope.

"Because it's a trail," he grunted to their peevish why's. "I been bringin' you along a hill path, bein' easier on your feet."

It was not till gathering dusk that they saw why. Voices filtered down the trail, many of them, chattering, cheerful. From their little niche they could see. A Burman native, a blotch of color flitting through the greenery like a butterfly, silk clad in his funny skirt of zigzag lightning strokes, a green silk bandana tied about his head in a jaunty flaring knot. Behind him, in single file, little yellow men in dusty drab uniforms with their funny bashed-in, long-vizored caps—and rifles. Some carried an extra rifle.

"I figured," Tolan whispered, "if there was any hillmen among 'em they'd take a long slant and join up with the rest lower down. Means," he fixed his somber eyes on them, "their main column is pushing up the valley—between here and Thayetmyo."

Grant was staring wide-eyed down at the path, hopefully without hope. Wade was too utterly played out to care. The last of the cheerful little yellow men passed. Hope was dead in Grant's voice.

"No prisoners."

"Ye-e-eh!" It came in a rasp from Tolan. He crouched staring at the darkening path. Then he said, his voice dry and harsh: "Means he took my promise with him to wherever it is that a brave man goes."

"What promise?" Grant's mind seemed to be dulled with fatigue.

"Aw, ne'mind." Then Tolan suddenly fired an order at him, brusque and commanding. "Wait here. Not a move. Not a sound. Likely there'll be some stragglers."

HE WAS in a sudden silent hurry. He took the British bayonet that his friend had given him, stuck it naked into his belt, lowered himself into the dusky shadows of the bushes. Faint crackles, as of some big marauding animal marked his descent to the path. Jungle silence closed down like a softly darkening lid. The day noises began to still; parrots squawked sleepily; far away white-faced gibbons hoo-hoo'ed their bedtime song. The path was a pale crooked ribbon in the dusk.

Feet pattered along it, a dim shape running to catch up with the rest. Another shape, long and darkly blurred, projected itself from the higher bank, as a leopard leaps from its hiding upon its unsuspecting kill. It hit the other running shape at shoulder height, took it in the weight of its leap, crashed on into the underbrush of the lower hill.

Pent-up tenseness broke from Grant in a choked squeak before he covered his mouth with his hand. Below the path was a silence as sudden as when a leopard has luckily broken its victim's neck with the first flying wrench.

Then a single long black shadow flitted across the path, merged into the higher bank. Again silence. Till a nocturnal hyrax high in its teak top suddenly screamed like an unhappy ghost. A porcupine came out of its rotted log and ambled down the hillside making as much noise as a bear. Then voices, grunting monosyllables, hurrying. Grant couldn't see how many; he could see only the round spot of a bobbing flashlight. His throat closed tight till he couldn't breathe. He could only listen. He heard a thud of bodies, grunts, a half shout; the flashlight spun a wide dizzy arc, blinked out. Straining noises. More grunts. An *u-u-ugh*. Threshing limbs. Silence.

A long silence. A dreadful waiting of black ignorance. No more pattering feet. No sound. The hyrax again, answered by a lost soul farther away. A light! A thing that moved with the speed of an airplane, its distance quite incomputable against the empty night; and it buzzed. It swooped suddenly close over the path and zoomed skimming the

He projected himself from the higher bank as a leopard leaps upon its unsuspecting kill.

hillside, its illusion so startling that Grant shrank and flung his arms over his head before his mind adjusted itself. It was only a great lampyrid beetle that carried twin head- and tail-light for all the world like a plane.

Then a faint crackling right below the ledge that lifted Grant's stomach into his throat and Tolan's dissatisfied voice.

"Only three of 'em all told." And after another silence: "Not enough."

"You mean," Grant chilled to a possibility that might leave him and his companion frightfully alone in an environment of which they knew nothing, "you think there may be more coming?"

"Stragglers? Not now, I guess. I mean, the way I figure it, for a man like Jack was, three don't begin to pay the bill. No more tonight, hardly. But no campfire all the same, just in case."

A CHILL, white, foot-hill morning. Only green islands humping out of a mist that heaved and swirled above mysterious unseen impulses, the whole world whispering a soft wet drip that fell from the leaves like rain, the air as exhilarating as tangy wine—and Long Tolan hugging his knees, frowning at his very nearly inert freight moaning and creaking out of their exhaustion. He said: "You uns can't do any more mountain climbing and that's no bad bet. Any hope you had of makin' Upper Burma, forget it."

They could only look at him. He read

their expressions and savagely he said: "Aw, shake it off. He took my promise to see you through." He scowled critically at Wade. "This'n'll never hoist his little weight over next hill." He shifted his scowl over the far spreading archipelago that dwindled away to the west till the last little islet disappeared beneath the white sea, leaving only tall bamboos dipping like taut fish poles. Then ruminatively to himself: "Holdin' to down grades now— Might make along valley's edges and likely keep hid o' Japs." He put it bluntly to Grant: "Can you all walk on the flat?"

"Oh, certainly," said Grant, his whole plump face lighting like a man's from whom torture has been removed. "Level ground would be all right. It's just that we're not used to mountain climbing."

"Hnr-rh! How much you ever walked on the flat with your own two feet? I mean at one stretch? I mean, since school age? Five, ten city blocks? And the flat—" Tolan's eyes swung back over the white western horizon to stare at it as though he could look through to the sea's bottom. "The flat, like I said, is purely despiteful. Like *all* that I said—and there's Burman villages too." He shrugged his eyebrows out of their scowl. "But it's flats or nothing. Well—here's hoping."

In moody anxiety he set to rolling blankets. Suddenly he asked: "Either o' you uns shoot a rifle? I got three extras."

Grant was diffident after the blunt dissection of his walking prowess. "I shot a twenty-two as a youngster."

"Hnr-rh!" Tolan looked at Wade, haggardly unrested after the night's sleep. "Reckon I'd better carry one extra—if I have to shuck some grub for it. Well, let's get crawlin' along."

It took two days of downhill crawling to get out of the foot-hills, and the flat country then was all that Tolan had said of it. A month yet to the rainy season; the dead calm days before the monsoon; the heat at its lower Burmese best. The yellow clay dust of the Irrawaddy Valley floated as lightly as the mountain mists, gritted between their teeth, gummed their eyes, rolled pellets under their tongues. Long Tolan helped Wade along like a wounded man. Grant, stronger, couldn't lift his feet to the step; he sloughed along through the dust and it rose in hot billows about him.

"A lot softer 'n city streets," Tolan panted, but there was no grin on his face to accompany the jibe. He propped Wade up in a niche between the buttressed roots of a vast *podocarpus* tree and drew Grant aside. He hawked dryly to find moisture for speech.

"The puny un's just about done out," he told Grant bluntly. "What's he got, a bad heart?"

Grant was glad of the respite to sink down on a root. "I'm afraid so." He kept his eyes closed to the glare. "Of course we never expected to find ourselves trapped like this. Nobody believed such a fast enemy advance could ever happen."

"Ye-e-eh! Another old British custom," Tolan rasped. "All they ever fight with is guts, and this time just guts ain't enough. So you're here. And I'm telling you this: That'n can't make any farther and there's no maybes to it. So let's hear how you figure it out."

GRANT, dead-eyed, gummed with grime, could only blink stickily at him. The best he had to offer was the age-old instinct of civilized man in distress in the safe and sane home country where the neighbor is near and normally humanitarian. "Couldn't we—you—get help somewhere—somehow?"

"Help?" Tolan stood wide-legged over the man as though he could shake him for his silliness. His exasperation at sheer uselessness flared out. "How do I know how long it'd take me to get help? Or what other garrisons the Japs have wiped out 'cause the Britishers had only six months warning to get ready? Sure I can get out of here. I can dodge my way around—somehow—'n get to help; and I c'ld maybe even persuade it to fight around out to here to pick up just two fellers when it's got a war on its hands and men like Jack O'Day are dying 'cause they couldn't send him help."

Grant blinked at him, gray-faced.

"Sure I c'd maybe do all that. But—" His fury dropped to the chilling con-

sideration of unpleasant fact. He said it softly: "How long d'you figure all that would take me? A week? Two weeks? Skulkin' around back jungles lookin' for an unconquered spot?" And still more deadly softly: "And how long—d'you figure—you'd last out, alone in this front suite o' hell's hotel? If no tiger'd smell you out? Or worse, Burman natives? How long, mister? You guess it. 'N as for him—" He frowned over towards Wade, inert and oblivious amongst the roots.

Grant let his swollen eyes close again on that picture. He sat very still. Then he repeated the incentive that was the prime mover of his every action.

"My report is very important. So—" His voice stuck there and Tolan finished it for him.

"So they picked *you* to get it." He was not being intentionally insulting to a helpless man. He was, rather, in a perpetual daze about the helplessness of the kind of man they picked. "Damn, I got to suppose there's a right smart o' things city fellers learn that's some useful, but they'd sure ought to learn where the use ain't."

"So—" Grant's voice came strongly now. His effort to hold his eyes sternly on Tolan contorted his face. "I am making you a proposition—I am giving you an order."

"*You?* Order *me?*" The whole of Tolan's hereditary individualism stared from him.

"Let me finish, please. My report deals with joint defense and American cooperation. It is very important to our country. Therefore—you will carry it with you. You will win your way to its safe delivery to some person in authority who will know where to forward it. If you can then return with help—in time—I shall be grateful. If not—" The painful eyes closed down again.

Long Tolan stared down at the man. Slowly his frown came to narrow down his eyes, passed on slowly to pinch his lips in a tight line, his head slowly nodding.

Then, "Ye-eh!" he breathed. "Guts, like I said. Maybe that's what they picked you for." He looked away to Wade's snug nest amongst the giant roots. His teeth came to bite on his lower lip. His scowl was ferocious, slowly passing from the nest to the scrub jungle landscape.

He swore the exasperation of a strong man at futility and then a fierce energy of decision surged through his rumination.

Tolan lifted Grant by the arm. He was savage about every infantile thing he had to do.

"Now look, mister. *I'm* giving orders. You set here with your Wade, snug and hid. The roots protect you, exceptin' straight out front. Here's your Jap rifle. It loads here, see? You cock it pullin' back this bolt, so—and damme if those slick yellows haven't got an automatic safety—this gadget, see? You thumb it forward to shoot—like this. Is that much clear? All right."

He was stuffing blankets behind Grant's back, under Wade's supine limpness.

Grant let it all happen with the silent resignation of a man whose inherent patriotism had made up his mind to sacrifice his lesser personal safety for the greater need. He nodded only automatically to Tolan's brusque instructions.

"So listen then. Anything moves out front, you shoot it—or at it. Beast or man, you take no chances. Keep shootin' as long as your shoulder holds out—which'll be about three clips, as you'll know when you try it. Anyway, here's their shell pouches; I brought 'em all along."

He showed Grant how to extract and load the Mauser-type clips, like teaching a child a new art.

"Got it all? All right. Feed this'n water; 'n watch for cuttin' your fingers when you open a can of anything with the bayonet. But cold. No smoke. No move. You're downy buck tails an' you set close to ground. Understand? All right then. I'll be back—if the luck holds. Which, if your story's as important to Uncle Sam as you say, it may do."

He dodged away between the clumps of thorny scrub, loping incredibly strongly through the dust that rose in smoke behind him like a locomotive.

CHAPTER IV

THE NIPS

GRANT nearly shot him when he came back. Expecting a slowly cumulative exhaustion of days, he saw something move before his bloodshot vision before the sun had raised the landscape to a mild cooking heat and he manfully up and shot at it.

Tolan's voice yelled at him—but bright silk Burman *gaungbaungs* flashed between the scrubby tree stems. The natives came sullenly forward, four of them. It seemed that Tolan's scowl had transferred itself to their faces, for his own was extraordinarily cheerful.

"The luck held," he grinned, "and here's the help. So now you hold your gun on 'em while I get busy."

He gabbled jerky Burman words at them. They hunkered down to sit on their own feet in the attitude that their own kings had taught them to denote respect. Their eyes rolled towards Grant's ineffective rifle. Tolan gabbled some more. He must have lied frightfully, for the men subsided to cowed resignation.

With the four Burmans Tolan had acquired a *dah*, a most useful weapon with which and some string a native expert builds his house. Tolan was not that expert, but the work he had in hand required no skill, only sweat. He cut a pair of straight saplings and trimmed them down to bare poles. He was already well caked with smoky grime from his journey, and now the sweat from under his mushroom-shaped hat made little white paths down his face.

Grant looked uncomfortable in his shade. He suggested quite humbly: "I hesitate to butt in on your efficiency. But you'll be wearing yourself out there; and we, Wade and I, couldn't nurse you along then. Why not let the natives do whatever it is?"

Tolan wiped the drops from his brow with his wrist and grinned at him over his work.

"Ever see a Burman throw a *dah*? They'll cut you in halves. And they'll have their plenty to do in a little while."

Grant looked at the "help" with a respect more sincere than their attitude.

"Oh! They're rebels? I suppose then we'll have to watch them?"

Tolan grunted and his quick-moving hands paused over their work while his concentration diverted itself to a viewpoint that had always seemed to him to be peculiarly biased and the cause of so much trouble, including his own.

"Rebels, eh? So the Britishers say. Traitors an' all that. But if you could talk with them, they'd tell you they was patriots grabbin' at the chance to win back their freedom that the British wouldn't give 'em. Same's those Polacks an' Slovaks that kick out from under the Heinie hoof."

Grant blinked at him, puzzled over that other side of the question.

"Ye-eh! Rebels," Tolan said dryly. "Seems to me a rebel depends on just who's up top givin' the orders. In this case," his teeth closed down so that the words were sibilant through them, "I'm givin' the orders. So—you saying your report was important to Uncle Sam—I had to bully these lads along some."

"Oh!" Grant's acid tone implied that he did not know whether he quite liked that line of reasoning. "Passing the buck on to higher authority, eh?"

Tolan was tying blanket corners to crosspieces, that he had lashed to his poles. He looked up to hold Grant's eyes. "Be you higher authority?"

Grant's momentary flash of self-assertion flickered out under the reminder of his demonstrated ineffectuality.

"I pass no buck," Tolan stated with finality. "What I did—what I'm doing, is on my own."

A grim something seemed to underlie that hint of whatever drastic thing that masterless man might have done to compel four surly men who were out in full resistance to white man domination to come away with him.

"Well, er— What did— How. . . .?"

Tolan finished tying his improvised hammock. "Well, they wouldn't listen to reason. So—" He commenced knotting blankets for another one. "I purely had to set fire to their village and I conked these four strong lookers as they ran around."

"Good God! You— They'll be savage for revenge!"

"Mister," said Long Tolan, "what you said a whiles back sorta convinced me that your report was plumb important to Uncle Sam. Or did you know any other way o' gettin' you out o' here alive—perhaps?"

Grant was silent. Tolan's hard grin came out.

"And here's the puny unable to sit up an' take notice. The luck's holdin'. Let's get goin'."

He gabbled at the Burmans. Each took up one end of a pole on their shoulders. He invited Grant and Wade to their swinging transport; he slashed a palm frond for each one as a fan. The sturdy Burmans made a pretense of groaning at their weight. Tolan grinned.

"Givin' 'em a taste of what the Japs'll hand out after they're freed 'em from the white man yoke. Thwa ba, Lu gyi! Git movin'."

The inert freight transport shuffled along. The dust smoked behind them like a railway train. Tolan coughed along in it, herding them.

THEY camped in the merciful shelter of a mango *tope* amongst empty huts where there had once been people, the sun slanting a lowering red-hot ball on their faces.

"Do you think—" Grant looked anxiously about at the overgrown yards behind their little bamboo fences that were still in good repair. "Is a place like this safe? Nobody will suddenly return?"

"A place like this is the only place." Tolan croaked his reply. "There'll be a well and if I can't get this plains country muck an' sweat outen my hide I'll purely strangle. Water's likely safe enough by now."

"What do you mean, 'by now'?" Grant had all the hygiene-conscious American's quick horror of water other than sparkling through pipes from a chlorinated reservoir.

Tolan pointed with his head. "That clay Buddha, face turned away from the doorway in his little pagoda, means they up and lit out account of cholera, or maybe bubonic. There's villages like this all over the flatlands," he said.

Grant's eyes, after his rest in the hammock, were able to open wide. They did so on Tolan's callous acceptance of conditions in the hateful plain country. After a while he said: "We are heading west, aren't we?"

Tolan's voice was sour at the reminder.

"So what?"

"Well, I mean—you were saying that—"

"Thayetmyo," Tolan told him wearily, "is the only chance. You uns not able to hold to mountain country, Jap column swarmin' up the valley, already ahead of us, what hope we got to make north? But there's just a chance for Thayetmyo on the river where the British gunboats have maybe held out."

"Well, er—I mean about—"

Tolan's irritation flared out at him. "Aw, forget it, will you? He got my promise to deliver you safe. So then shut up about it." And after a morose contemplation of the sun's haze-magnified disk: "What you uns got to worry about is we don't run into Jap supply units trickling along after the rest." His dust-reddened eyes turned to frown towards Wade. "And about him. He ought to be pickin' up better, rested an' all. Reckon you better see what you can feed into him. I got to go peel down an' dip me a sluice out that well, pure or poison, else I'm due to choke."

Grant's popping eyes softened down to anxiety. "Yes," he said. "Yes, of course. I should have thought of it. Only you—sort of indestructible— Let me see what I can do about getting together a meal; and after your wash you'd better turn in for a good night's rest. Even you can't keep this sort of thing up."

Tolan grinned at him, tolerantly amused, as a teacher might at a pupil in whom he has discovered willingness if not aptitude.

"Are you figuring, son"—Grant was half as old again as he was—"to set up an' be sure-fire sure that your porters won't get a chance to remember they're savage for revenge?"

Grant shrank into his accustomed silence. This man was always putting

such simply direct questions to him for which he had no answers. But Grant found an answer to this one. He sort of exploded into it.

"By God!" A thought that had been stubbornly resistant to birth burst at last into conviction. "When I get back home I'll do something about it. I'll go to a gym to harden up. I'll take up walking —or golf, or something." And his pride of position had to save face that had been exposed by his emotion. "At that, I'm no worse than millions in the same sort of job in Washington—or in any similar city."

Tolan's cold irony of disapproval could thaw out under the warm balm of contrition and the desire to make amends. He gave the best he could for the city life.

"I reckon you all make a pretty sight o' money in the city, though. More to a year 'n a man like me'll likely see in a life-time."

Grant made more in a week. But he didn't intrude that as an item of face saving. He proceeded with his promise of regeneration.

"I tell you, when I get back—" He saw Tolan's smile, wearily twisted, and his eagerness shivered away from him in that hot evening. "You are thinking, *if* we get back, isn't that it?"

Tolan nodded slowly, his eyes once again gazing out into the quickly encroaching gloom, seeing nothing. After a long while he said: "Another good day, drivin' 'em till they drop, might make it—if the luck holds."

THE luck did not—could not; even for a man who made his luck as he went along. It was a bare halfway through that day when they ran into the Jap foraging squad. They ought not to have been caught so unawares; only that Long Tolan, perforce bringing up the rear to herd his kidnaped porters along, could not go scouting out in front. And the keen edge of his senses was dulled by the sheer weariness that was building up poison in his system.

They were emerging out of a *nullah*, one of the myriad little erosion gullies that crisscrossed the plain in every direction, all finally merging into bigger *nullahs* that eventually reached the great river. Tolan chose them whenever their direction seemed favorable for the very reason that they offered concealment and the scouring of the monsoon rains kept them free of scrub growth.

The leading hammock, Grant's, was just topping the edge, Tolan himself below the grade, when a surprised challenge came. The Burmans let out a babble of yells, half of fierce joy at rescue, half of fear at being caught unarmed in a fight. Fear was the more correct reaction—for the challenger, without waiting for reply or whether friend or foe, fired at the first thing he saw.

Tolan woke out of his weariness all running. He shoved past Wade's hammock, sending the porters staggering, reached where he could see over the edge —and saw a little yellow man running forward, shouting unintelligible commands that could mean nothing other than halt and hands up.

Tolan halted, and brought his rifle up instinctively. The yellow man pitched and rolled like a rabbit. Without knowing that he looked, Tolan saw on the one side, Grant hobbling down towards him; on the other, the Burmans scuttling, bending unnecessarily low, down the *nullah* the way they had come; out front, some little distance yet, more yellow men running forward amongst the scrubby mimosa stems.

His next fast shot dropped the nearest incautious one and reminded the others to find what sparse cover they could.

And the next surprise was Grant at his side, fumbling with his Japanese rifle. Wade, lower down, still lay enveloped in the blankets of his hammock. Grant had remembered at least how to keep loading and shooting his gun, and that was just what he did.

CHAPTER V

SIX YEARS' LEAVE

COURAGE is a quality that a man has or has not. That he was one who had it, Grant had already demonstrated and he was woefully demonstrating now that

he was also one of the many millions who have not the cold control of nerve to sight their shots when somebody else is shooting at them. In a mad fury of excitement he was pumping shots at nothing more vulnerable than the general direction and Tolan was astounded to hear him cussing a muttered stream of irrelevant nothings.

"Easy, son, easy!" Tolan was peering over the *nullah's* edge as warily as a leopard watching distant prey. "That's the way, last war, it took forty thousand bullets, so tell, to kill one man. Watch how to do. See that monkey face lookin' out behind the crooked *padouk* stem? Ss-sso!"

He whispered it to the soft press of his trigger. Spasmodic hands from behind the tree threw away a rifle; the face rasped down the trunk.

Grant yelled: "By God, that's telling the———! I wish I could shoot like—" He blazed away a shot, Tolan didn't know at what.

"Better join up in a rifle club along with your golf—when you get back." The normal defiance of a fighting man in his fight stressed the *when,* in place of the former *if*. "It can be learned, I've heard say; though for myself, Grampappy Asa always said us Hatfields are born with a rifle in the bed." He was thinly grinning. "And the luck's holdin' at that. This gully's as good a trench as any ever dug under general's orders."

He fired again. Somebody must have been hit, for a grunt was followed by a locomotive shrill of squeals and a little red pig ran shrieking off amongst the bushes.

"Ye-eh! A foraging party," Tolan breathed. "Means there won't be so many of 'em."

Shots came from scattered points in bursts; individuals pumping their magazines with all the frenzy of hurriedly trained troops. Tolan grunted his former appraisal: "Farm hands. Rice planters. Lucky the jungle fighters that learned in Malaya must be pushin' along with the advancin' column."

Dust exploded into little geysers. Sand stung their faces snuggled low over their trench edge. Grant ducked to the heart-stopping z-z-zing of a richocheting bullet.

"These boys," Tolan coughed, "don't know just how thick a tree hides all of 'em. See that shoulder? Ss-sso, gun. You teach it."

Grant fired, yelled mad exultation. "I got one! By Jesus, I'm sure I got one!"

Somebody from out front fired. Tolan's left arm flung away from him. He cursed sibilantly through hard-bitten teeth, meaning every word of it. He was able to recover his arm and control his gun again. Somebody out there yelled.

"This borrowed Britisher gun," Tolan gritted sand between his teeth, "ain't so bad, though those monkeys stole a better, jumpin' my camp."

Minutes passed. Tolan fired again at a threshing movement in a bush. "Think that's one we'd already got." More minutes passed. No more shots.

"Think that's likely the lot. Or the rest have run. Anyway, here's a breathin' spell." Tolan jerked out his shirt, tore the tail. "You'll have to tie my arm here. It burned all the way through an' the luck's holdin'—Hey! D'you stop one with your leg there? How the devil an' all?"

Memory came back to Grant through his excitement and his face twisted with his sudden realization of pain.

"That very first shot. I was in the hammock."

"The devil!" Tolan tore the pants leg all the way up to the thigh. Blood still oozed gummily from a tight little hole. Tolan quickly twisted the limb to look on the other side. His breath hissed between tongue and teeth.

"Only one hole! The very devil an' all!" He was swearing as fluently as Grant during the fight, his fingers flying with a savage speed to wad a stone into his strip of shirt and tie it over the wound. "This is a sonova break. Well, you can stand on it anyway and you'll have to walk. We gotta get from here. That shootin' 'll bring others like carcass flies."

"I'll—manage." Grant winced.

"You'll good an' damn well have to. If Wade can only keep up—" He looked down the gully to the other tumbled hammock. "Hell, he'd oughta be crawled out o' that by now." He ran to unroll the bundle.

"Eh-h-h!" His swearing stopped in bewilderment. "He couldn't ha' been hit by anything down here." Grant was at his shoulder, staring, his face whiter than at any twinge over his painful wound.

"Guess his heart," Tolan was rolling the bundle up again, "or whatever all he had, just gave out on him." He jerked to tear a strip from the blanket, stood up savagely alive to the immediate need.

"No time for digging. We got to move! Here, take a turn round my arm with this. C'mon! Not down gully. The Burmans went that way 'n they could bushwhack us, rollin' rocks. We'll have to take our chance over the top and run your damnedest."

THE luck, badly battered, still held together. No bullets came. They got away from that danger spot and they contrived to make some distance from it. Their own dust hid them as much as did the sparse mimosa scrub.

Till Grant sagged down on a thick low branch, careless of its thorns.

"Just a mite of rest." His teeth were tight over his lower lip. "Just a half-hour, and I'll be able to go on."

"Not a half-minute," Tolan grated. "Stiffen up and we're stuck. C'mon! Hup!"

He lifted Grant, an arm over his shoulder. Together they lurched along like a drunken pair, their minds equally hazy in their dust fog.

A root tripped both at once. Tolan sprawled face down; his huge panting blew little dust spirals before he could roll over onto his back. He lay so, rasping out of a dry throat—for more than half a minute. For perhaps half an hour before a mounting rage at his own weakness drove some of its surplus energy into his limbs.

He sat up. Through bleary half-closed eyes he took in the landscape. To swallow was a dry impossibility. He chewed on dust till he could spit.

"Blasted plains country! Shrivels a man purely puny! An' the blasted dust advertises our goin' like a train." He shook Grant out of a wheezy stupor. "C'mon. Look. Trees are showin' greener. Means water. Likely the *jheel* swamps this side o' Thayetmyo."

Grant struggled up and immediately dropped, his wound stiff in numbness, the other leg that he had been favoring knotted in cramp. His face was twisted with the agony of it and the knowledge that he had reached as far as ever he would go. He lay back sweating till the cramp slowly let go. When he could speak again through his gritted teeth he reverted again to a proposal he had made once before in circumstances not one tenth as desperate.

"It's my report that—matters. You can still—make it—alone. So—for Uncle's sake—" Pain and helplessness surged to rage. "Go on, god damn you! Don't gape at me! Take it and—get away quick! And thanks—buddy."

Tolan remained gaping, too exhausted himself to let his old anger flare at the suggestion. But he had the same answer for it.

"Damn to yourself. Jack O'Day took mountain promise I'd deliver the goods. I'm rested up—and there's piggy back yet."

Grant fretted at him. "You lie, you're not rested. And you can't carry me. You couldn't hold me to your back with your wounded arm, not for ten minutes. Take the report and get away."

Tolan mustered a grin as hollow as a skull. "Reckon you city fellers maybe never had to tote cord wood."

Stiffly he took off his pants, leaving himself scant in his torn shirt. He knotted the legs to make a wide sling, adjusted it like a seat under Grant. "You'll have to manage and hop up yourself. Once I'd get down, I'd never hoist you. But up an' got set, I can tump line."

SOMEHOW, staggering, clawing at branches with their hands, the maneuver was accomplished. Grant clung to Tolan's back, his arms over his shoulders, the sling under his seat and passing over Tolan's forehead. Stiff-necked, stiff-legged, Tolan staggered away, ankle-deep through the dust, lurching into thorny twigs, bumping into trees.

He knew he had reached the *jheel* swamp when he fell into it. Its scummy lukewarmness shocked him like a cool mountain spring. He rolled over in it, gasping. His mouth at surface level, he drank heavenly slime with great noisy suckings. His pores soaked it up.

Presently it seeped into his senses that there had been somebody else with him. He looked around and saw that Grant had somehow fallen from his back and still lay on the bank. His mind hated the thought of bestirring energy to get out of his bath; but he dragged Grant in, wondering dully whether he might be dead and not very much caring.

Grant came back out of a parched limbo very close to death. He mumbled: "Is this the river? Have we made it?"

"*Jheel,*" Tolan mumbled back. "Make it if—luck holds—'Cle Sam's luck—'mportant message—"

An Irrawaddy *jheel* is a long shallow swamp, miles long, not nearly so wide. It was once an old bed of the river, often enough still connected by oozy channels.

Long Tolan didn't know how he traversed it. The only consistent impulse in his mind was that it *had* to be traversed. He couldn't rightly remember why. And suffusing itself around and over that necessity was a vague gratefulness that he didn't have to carry anything on his back. Its weight waterborne, he could drag it, and, at that, its arms and legs seemed viciously, wilfully, to entangle themselves in all manner of dead and drowned slime and drag it monstrously trailing behind. He thought dreamily that perhaps at times he swam and then at times he didn't think at all. He would wake out of those times with his face in the water and breathing it chokingly into his lungs. He thought that for endless periods of time he sloughed along through the bottom ooze on his knees; he was unable to feel his feet; his left arm was dead. He thought he did have a right arm that was in some horrible manner glued to something he couldn't let go of and he had to drag it with him forever. He thought he heard voices. He thought they sounded like American voices. He didn't care. He thought nothing at all.

HE THOUGHT he heard voices again and this time the thought persisted till it was actually so. Unwillingly he dragged his consciousness back from a luxury of clean smells and comfort and rest; and then he was awake and on an army camp cot and in a tent and the voice was saying: "You can't hurt this one. He's all scrap iron and wire."

Long Tolan opened his eyes and saw a man in a uniform with a white apron over it. The man smiled down at him. "Well, young fellow, how do you feel?"

An anxiety took shape that had been impinging itself throughout the long luxury of rest. Tolan twisted his neck to look about the tent. The anxiety flamed to a fear.

"That city feller? Did I have him? He had a mighty important— If I didn't have him along, we got to go back an' look for him 'n the swamp."

(Continued on page 124)

THE TUB AND THE TORTOISE

By
WARD TANZER

THREE years ago, the sight of five hundred cases of French champagne would have been common enough on the Consolidated Lines' loading platform in Sydney harbor. In those days, Marseille wine exporters transshipped through the Australian port to points in French Oceania, and Consolidated freighters—such as the 9,000-ton *Tropica* on which the silent little man at my side and I had passenger reservations—dropped off plenty on their Noumea-New Caledonia-Tahiti run.

But this was the late fall of 1941.

ILLUSTRATED
BY
I. B. HAZELTON

Caught in the tail-end of a twister off the ugly mouth of Magatea Pass.

For more than a year a Hitler-dominated France had failed to squeeze a drop of exports, champagne or otherwise, through Britain's blockade. Wine importers' stocks down-under were pitiful. Retailers asked fabulous prices for the few bottles they'd hoarded.

"Didn't know there were five hundred dozen Mumm's left south of the equator," I hazarded to the man beside me as the *Tropica's* loading boom lowered over the cases.

He said nothing, merely shifted his weight from one elbow to the other on the passengers' rail. Through tortoise shell spectacles he stared dreamily at the champagne soaring skyward on its dollies . . . plummeting into the gloom of the hatch. Something about the sight seemed to throw a strange boyish expression over his middle-aged features.

When the last lot of wine was aboard and the "cast off" order had sounded, he turned suddenly, stuck out his hand and said: "My name's Harry McNiel. What's yours?"

I gave it. His blue eyes flickered momentarily.

"We've handled some of those baulky marine motors you manufacture."

I smiled dutifully. "Are you Favors & McNiel?" I asked. F & M is an exporting partnership that makes so much money each year on San Francisco-Sydney trading operations it hurts.

He nodded. "I'm the Australian end. You know Tubby Favors in San Francisco?"

"By reputation," I answered, fighting back the smile that spreads on Bay folks' faces whenever the sentimental old elephant's name comes up. "Favors paying back in favor," I added as further identification.

McNiel swallowed, and what I'd swear to God were tears welled up in his eyes. He turned back to the rail, his thin shoulders sinking into the crisp folds of his expensive gray suit. I wondered if I'd put my foot into something.

Pointing to the deck crew now battening down the covers of the champagne hatch, Harry McNiel said, "The Tub and a woman and I are slinging a party for the Honu islanders with that wine."

I guess my jaw fell. Even in the South Seas—where entertaining has a way of taking on unheard of forms—even there such a party was unimaginable. Harry McNiel's thin lips twisted into a fleeting half-grin. "How about dropping down to my cabin for a drink in ten minutes?" He seemed suddenly full of something.

He left me still wondering if I'd heard right. A coral-reefed atoll northeast of Tahiti, Honu is peopled with a few hundred half-civilized kanakas who wouldn't know champagne from needled soda pop, I'm sure. Since the price of tortoise shell fell following the decline of the spectacle fad in the States in 1925, Honu (meaning tortoise—the place crawls with big ones) has lapsed into obscurity.

Sydney harbor was falling astern as I made my way to McNiel's cabin. He had beer ready. "I don't drink anything harder," he explained. "O. K.?"

We had one, two, three.

Finally he asked, "D'you ever get sentimental about the business you built?"

I said yes. They tell me that artists confess affection for early works that mark the beginnings of careers. Why we creatures of commerce can't cradle memories of business babyhoods, I don't know. I said so.

"You'll do," said Harry McNiel.

Ten minutes later he was into his story, his words tumbling out as though they'd been waiting years for release.

THERE was nothing in his birth and early childhood, McNiel said, to predict the three nightmare years which, in a way, the champagne was to commemorate, years aboard a rotten hulk of a schooner twisting around coral reefs in the Dangerous Archipelago.

"I was born," he said, "in Tahiti of an American missionary couple who were set on sending me and my sister, Charlotte, to some school in the States, as soon as they could get the wherewithal together.

"Before anything was arranged—when I was fourteen and my sis nineteen—influenza took the matter in hand. During the epidemic the two of us saw our folks' bodies carted away to be burned

in one of the pyres that claimed a third of Tahiti's population.

"Following this, things got tough: missionaries don't leave much money."

He and his sister, he said, were finally taken in by some Tahitian converts in the town of Papeete. Within a month's time he was eating with his fingers native fashion, hell-catting around at night, using the native lingo to the exclusion of English and French.

How distressing such goings-on were to Charlotte can be guessed by the drastic step she took a few weeks later. She married to make a home for her brother; exchanged vows with a newcomer ten years older than herself who had left the States to direct his uncle's trading house in Papeete, without management since the flu plague.

Harry McNiel knew little about the big stranger—he was enormously heavy—other than that the man had been running salmon between Seattle and San Francisco. And that he drank little, an attribute which, in Papeete bridegrooms, is often more rare than physical beauty. Also, the huge stranger was kind, jolly, white. Already he'd showed an extraordinarily canny business head. And he worshipped the great-eyed beauty that was Harry's sister.

The lad remembered biting back tears at the ceremony, vowing someday to make it up to his gallant sis.

They took a charming *niau*-thatched villa, the three of them, on the palm-bordered beach at Faaa, close enough to Papeete for the husband, far enough out for Harry to swim, spear fish and hunt wild goats.

"Am I going too fast?" Harry McNiel asked.

I said, "No, but where do the three years on the schooner come in?"

McNiel drew a deep breath as if to fortify himself against some approaching unpleasantry.

The first year, he said, was pretty close to heaven there in the *niau* villa. His brother-in-law was swell. The two of them sailed together; discussed the U.S. magazines that the man received regularly; Harry got a pony. What was more, the growing Harry saw his sister transform from a frantic girl into a contented woman deeply in love. On Harry's sixteenth birthday a son was born. The brother-in-law stood drinks for the town of Papeete.

"It seemed inconceivable at the time," murmured Harry McNeil, "that Charlotte would be leaving with the baby in a year. Things happen fast in Tahiti, though, once they get started."

He glossed over the details of the trouble, finished quoting a shrewd old trader in Papeete who had predicted a year before: "This Tubby Favors"—that was the brother-in-law's name—"is too damn likeable and big-hearted to keep from goin' under in Tahiti. Give him a year and he'll be guzzlin' worst than a kanaka."

With the vision of years, the old man had foreseen the dozens flocking around the genial Tub's office each day insisting on buying—or being bought—an 11 o'clock rum. Two, three, more before lunch. At first, spirits over business deals that wouldn't jell without them. Later, liquor all afternoon anyway. More and more hours away from the office. It was the old story written again: "The less they drink above the equator, the more they take aboard below."

Had it not been for the brilliant trading tactics employed by the Tub in earlier, sober days, his firm would have been bankrupt by the end of the second year. As it was, the creditors, headed by a German named Hermann Stoodt, were complaining.

Conditions at home, as was to be expected, grew sorry. The Tub's habit of breaking promises horrified his wife. He should have known her type wouldn't take it indefinitely.

One day there arrived the letter from Consolidated Lines' San Francisco office addressed to Charlotte. With wonderment, Harry read that Consolidated fancied Mrs. Favors' suggestion of establishing a Tahiti-Tourist bureau in the States. When would she arrive to take over? They named a livable salary.

"He'd go on forever, if I didn't jerk him to his senses," Charlotte had cried on Harry's shoulder on sailing day. "I love him too much to stay. You understand?" She grasped his arm. "Help

him, Bub. You're almost a man now. Maybe, between the two of us. . . ."

Harry promised. And Charlotte fled into her cabin with her year-old son.

"YOU'VE likely suspected by now," Harry McNiel smiled, "what a serious-minded cuss I was in those days. Maybe being orphaned had a bit to do with it. Anyway, I was sick about the split-up, made up my mind I'd pull along with the Tub for awhile—try to straighten him up.

"I didn't know him so well in those days. . . ."

Two weeks after Charlotte sailed, January, 1920, the boom fell on the Favors Trading Co. That it was expected did little to lessen the blow. Certainly only a man reeling under the twin disgraces of losing his family and his business would have answered the call the following day to Hermann Stoodt's office. The German said he had a deal to make the Tub.

Tahiti didn't like Herr Stoodt's deals, as a rule.

"Come along, boy," the Tub had mumbled to Harry that morning. The fat man bit his lip. "We're partners, y'know."

They must have made a strange picture in the office. In one corner sat the Tub, his bamboo cigarette holder adroop, his mammoth bulk dripping sweat in its linens. His eyes stared ahead like blank, brown marbles; his mouth twitched for the morning rum he'd been a week without.

By the window slumped Harry, his red hair on end, his mouth set in a grim line of youthful suspicion. He'd heard stories about Herr Stoodt's propositions.

Behind the broad-topped desk jutted the prognathous face of the German trader-chemist. With typical Teutonic foresight Herr Stoodt often found means of employing one vocation to further the other. Certainly the man had made both fields pay in Tahiti.

He approached the problem at hand with stinging delicacy.

"In your present financial—and physical—condition—" he hissed his s's—"you'd welcome a chance to return to the sea, Favors, yes? A trawler captain you were, I believe, in America?"

The Tub asked wearily, "What've you got?"

"This." The German slid a contract across the smooth desk top. It was the sort of agreement, Harry was to realize later, that only a sentimental man with things on his mind would have touched. Herr Stoodt, reader of men's characters, had timed his contract with precision. He now said the right thing: "That contract will bring Mrs. Favors back."

The Tub closed his eyes. Harry squirmed.

"In three years," Herr Stoodt continued, "my schooner will be yours. Easy installments. With it you can start building another trading business of your own."

"What's it say, Tub?" asked Harry.

The fat one was a thousand miles away. He answered mechanically, "Half the trading profits for skippering his schooner to the Archipelago. We pay a thousand francs a month on the boat for three years." With effort, he focused his near-sighted eyes on the contract. "In case the cargo's lost or damaged, we're liable . . . eh?" He glanced at Herr Stoodt.

The German nodded. "A small risk to take for one's family's sake."

"That ain't fair," Harry burst out. "None of the skippers hauling for you used to stand loss, Tub!"

"Suppose I can't make it good?" the Tub asked, ignoring Harry. His eyes shot longingly through the stuffy office's windows to the cool Papeete lagoon.

"I take it out in your services," the German answered softly.

Snapped Harry, "At what salary?"

"To be determined later." A trace of uneasiness crept into the German's tiny blue eyes. He scanned the Tub's streaming face. "The salary," he stated peremptorily, "will be fair."

Something in his eyes made Harry shout, "Fair, hell! They'll be deck-hand wages."

"Is it a custom for American young," Herr Stoodt shot out, "to interrupt their elders' talk?" He turned back to the Tub. "Who else in town would give you . . . *you* . . . a better deal?"

The Tub slumped forward like a man struck. With a shaking hand he scratched his name to the contract. He said, lumbering to the door, "You're too young to sign, boy."

"It's a damn gamble," Harry cried when they reached the street.

"Only thing I like about it," mumbled the Tub miserably, turning into the Tahiti Café for the one beer he now rationed himself per day. "'N lay off that hell-and-damn talk, boy," he added humbly. "What would your sister say?"

GAMBLE the two of them did during 1919 and 1920. Harry apprehensively, hoping somehow to make good his promise to a deserving sister. For two tremulous years the two bucked the tricky waters between Tahiti and the Dangerous Archipelago in the auxiliary schooner *Tiare,* a loggy 90-footer worth about half the number of installments Stoodt had demanded for her. They gambled cargoes on the dry rot in her after planking, during two years of hurricane-season storms through which the Tub somehow coaxed the groaning old girl. They gambled on the ascending weights of cargo that Herr Stoodt demanded more and more on outward trips; on the higher mountains of raw goods he exacted on her return. In time, the overloading of the *Tiare* became a topic along the Papeete quay. Favors' luck would break some night off a Tuamotu island reef in a *toerau* wind. The schooner would waddle up on the coral and be splinters, two days later.

"Why'n't you kick to Stoodt?" Harry had asked the Tub once in desperation, when the *Tiare's* water line was riding dangerously far beneath the water's surface.

The fat man had replied, "It's his boat."

"Who's got to make the cargo good, though?" Harry had lashed out. "Us, that's who! And how? Working it out for Stoodt at slaves' wages."

"Quit squawkin'," the Tub had snorted. "Contract's signed, isn't it?"

There was another worry burning its way into Harry's consciousness those foreboding days. Worry that Herr Stoodt would go to even greater extremes than overloading the *Tiare,* in the hope of jockeying the Tub into a hole out of which only Herr Stoodt could help him.

The Tub was making the German too much money.

Too often, under the circumstances, the fat man was showing his uncanny trading colors. As automatically as a setter scenting covey, the fat man sniffed deals. There was the trip on which he swapped copra for pearl shell on a hunch and tripled the take for the German when the *Tiare* returned to Papeete. He smelled the 1921 vanilla slump and sidestepped Herr Stoodt into the black carrying phosphate from Magatea Island. When copra prices soared later in the year, the Tub already had deposited a three month's inventory in the German's Papeete warehouse.

"How come you knew it was going up?" Harry had asked, half admiringly, half disapprovingly.

The Tub had rolled his button of a nose. "U. S. magazines," he answered quietly. Two of the four he read regularly, Harry discovered, had featured articles late in '20 on the sheen that coconut oil could achieve in women's hair.

"Stoodt's going to like it less and less you getting the *Tiare* clear and setting yourself up in a rival business," Harry had warned.

The Tub commanded, "Stop fussin'."

Harry said no more. Each time they landed in Papeete another well-meaning trader said it for him: "You're getting too smart for your own good, Tub."

The Tub laughed, always.

"Anyway," Harry had once made the mistake of saying, "Charlotte will come back, Tub, even if we have to drudge for Stoodt . . . long as you've stuck to one beer a day, the way you're doing. That's all—"

"Except I don't ask her," the Tub had snapped. "Not till the *Tiare's* ours. Not till I get a business going do I write her. Quit talkin' about it."

Like a dream born in fever, this thought lived with Harry as the months plodded by. As their equity in the *Tiare*

increased. As the loads grew heavier, if anything, and the schooner more difficult to handle. Some nights when a vicious *toerau* wind screamed through the *Tiare's* rotten rigging and she wallowed like an overloaded cow near to the jaws of a Tuamotu coral reef, this vision would spring forth before his eyes in the harsh outlines of near reality. While a white-faced Tub at the helm wheedled gale and bucked current, Harry at the sheets more than once found himself praying—frantic supplications phrased in the old Sunday-school speech of his childhood.

There was a night he fell on his knees. Caught in the tail-end of a twister off the ugly mouth of Magatea Pass, the Tub's skill failed for a time in the face of the odds. The sloppy *Tiare* neared, finally nudged the serried edge of the coral itself. There was a rasping sound as the port bilge keel scraped. The cargo shifted and groaned.

Harry never knew, in that long moment of screeching wind and roaring white water, how the *Tiare* pulled herself about into the zigzag tack that shot her past the northern shoulder of the pass into the quieter waters of the lagoon. Luck or providence, that. Without it, cargo, ship, dreams would have been chewed to bits within a few hours by the teeth of the coral.

Herr Stoodt had smiled there on the Papeete quay when he heard about the Magatea shave. He said a strange thing.

"Good thing you were full of rum, Favors," he called hoarsely to the Tub on the moored *Tiare*—loudly enough for the boat's crew as well as several quay loungers to hear. "You'd never have made it sober."

There was a tense moment of silence. Someone coughed. Then Harry shot out resentfully from his place at the aft hawser, "He ain't had more'n a beer a day for three years and you know it."

"Quiet, boy," the Tub had murmured, but a flicker of puzzled alarm crossed his face. With Harry he followed the German's eyes to the coral cut on the *Tiare's* port planking.

"Stop worrying, boy," the Tub had said as the trader-chemist turned away. "'N quit sayin' *ain't*."

Harry shook his red head. He couldn't sleep that night.

IT WAS shortly after ten the following morning—four hours before scheduled loading time—that the dissension occurred aboard the moored *Tiare*. Not long after, Harry was ashore, racing toward Lovaina's Hotel. The lad's hair and eyes spit red and blue sparks in the bright Papeete sun.

At a table on the veranda, the Tub set aside his batch of newly arrived U. S. magazines, rubbed his button of a nose reflectively and sighed. As Harry bounded up the steps, the fat one pulled at his beer and asked: "Stoodt kick you off the *Tiare*?"

Harry's sails spilled wind. "How'd you know he was loading her behind our backs?"

The Tub rolled his brown eyes toward a tableful of traders on the far veranda. "The Heinie's been pouring it aboard since eight, they told me. Only they can't tell what the cargo is."

"It's cases of some sort," Harry answered. His voice rose. "Why don't he want us to know what it is? You going to let him get away with it?"

"Boat won't be mine till two more trips." The Tub's great mouth tried to crack into a reassuring smile. "What you got in your hand there, boy?"

Harry sank back in his chair, his harassment subsiding into a sort of hopeless anguish. "But he's cooking something, Tub," he argued. "You ought to try to—"

"You been readin' too many story books." The Tub's eyes squinted nearsightedly over the veranda toward the thunderheads piling over the blue hills behind Papeete. A sliver of *toerau* ruffled the pages of his magazines, bowed the red blossoms of the hibiscus bushes. From nowhere, suddenly, came rain.

"Supposing that rotten after planking starts giving tonight, Tub"—Harry's eyes were pools of fear and worry— "because Stoodt maybe loaded the cargo heavy aft on purpose?"

"What you got there in your hand?" the Tub repeated. The rain now roared on the roof.

Harry sighed and slid two folded papers across the table. "Stoodt give 'em to me when he booted me ashore."

"Gave," corrected the Tub.

"Gave."

One proved to be the ship's cargo manifest. "Canned goods for Magatea," murmured the Tub.

"What's the value?"

"Fifty thousand francs."

Harry bit his lip. "It'll take us ten years to make that good at Stoodt's wages if anything happens."

"The Heinie got you leery, boy?" The Tub managed a smile and opened the second paper, a hand-inked chart. For an instant his smile froze. He looked nervously at the sky, rubbed his button nose in uncertain circles. Taking a bite on his bamboo cigarette holder, he straightened up in his chair, folded both papers into his wallet.

"What else you got, boy?" he asked, pointing to a letter Harry held under his freckled hands.

The young man spoke hollowly: "She says she—well—cries every night she's so happy you've straightened up—"

The Tub wiped some rain from his eyes. "What else?"

"She's ready to come back," Harry said. "Why're you waiting until you own the *Tiare*, Tub? With Stoodt acting up the way he is?" His voice pled.

"Wise up, boy," the Tub answered brusquely. "Come on. I got to send a cable before we sail. Stoodt ought to have the schooner loaded by now."

On the way out, they passed the table of traders. "Just heard Stoodt bought five hundred cases of rum from E. F. O. yesterday," one of the men said. "Maybe that's what the *Tiare's* taking to Magatea."

"*Nuhn-unh.*" The Tub smiled. "He'd be afraid I'd drink it before we got there."

Guffaws sounded around the table. "Better sit down and get in training anyway. You're three years out of practice." The man grinned.

"No thanks," the Tub answered. He eyed the speaker searchingly. "It'll have to be a real occasion, when I skid off. Ed," he said abruptly, "where'd you get those new specs?"

"The States. My wife says they're going to be all the go soon—the rims."

"Might be gettin' myself some someday," murmured the Tub. "S'long, boys."

Harry buttoned his pea jacket against the rush of wind and rain on the steps.

MIDNIGHT found the *Tiare* careening a course through waters fifty miles northeast of Papeete. Since sundown the growing *toerau* had kneaded the sea into deeper and deeper troughs, higher crests of black water. Now the overburdened *Tiare*, groggy as a gorged sow, was taking more than she missed over the nose. She yanked nastily at her helm. Vano, the Tahitian mate, braced his bare feet against the wheel block and with one arm wiped spray and rain from his unhappy face. Now and then his eyes glanced uneasily at the piling cumulus banking to the windward for more rain.

Forward in the galley, Harry hesitated between mouthfuls of stew to ask: "Get an answer to your cable, Tub?" He shot an inquiring glance toward a yellow message peeking out of the Tub's pea jacket.

"Just as we were castin' off," the fat man mumbled, bending lower over the magazine beside his stew bowl. "Did you ease the cargo off that weak after plankin'?"

"Much as I could," answered Harry. "While you were g e t t i n g orders squawked at you from Stoodt before we sailed."

The schooner lurched into a swell. Both men grabbed their slopping stew dishes. Something tinkled aft.

Harry glanced nervously to the pantry where Ah Ching, ship's cook, was sharpening his knives. "Stoodt hint at what we're loaded with?" he asked quietly.

"Canned goods, he said."

Harry's lip twisted. "The cases I shifted aft didn't handle like canned goods. Besides, they always have a brand stamped on the case. These're blank."

"Quit fussin'." The Tub frowned. He closed his magazine. "*Tiare's* floatin', isn't she?" His brown, weather-beaten fingers drummed on the mess table.

The *Tiare* staggered. Harry's disturbed eyes fastened on the spray-flecked galley porthole. "Anyway," he breathed, "we haven't got any lousy low island reefs to cross before we make Magatea. It'd be like that Hun to make us put in somewhere with this *toerau* and heavy load. . . ." A shiver passed through his narrow shoulders.

Something clinked aft again.

The Tub rolled his nose, glanced guardedly at a pigeonhole over Harry's head. Faintly visible in the flickering lamp light were the manifest and chart which Harry had brought to the hotel that morning. The fat man's bulk deflated in a sigh. "Why'n't you turn in, boy? I'm takin' over from Vano at two bells." He reached for his visored cap, swiveled on his stool from the table.

Ah Ching stepped from the ship's pantry sharpening his butcher knife. "Ah Ching butcher turtle, soon as *Tiare* cross Honu Island pass," he announced. His wrinkled face spread into a goodnatured toothless grin.

The Tub swore softly. His eyes dropped.

"Honu Island! Us?" Harry demanded. His mouth remained open.

The Tub spoke with the weary air of a man side-stepping an inevitability. "*Honu* means 'turtle' in kanaka," he stated in a bland, pedagogic voice. "The island swarms with big ones. Ah Ching was sayin' the natives race atop 'em. How'd you like to go for a ride?"

The Chinaman nodded: "Ah Ching in Honu long time ago. Butcher hundred turtle."

Silence hung heavy in the galley for a moment. The Tub sucked in his great cheeks unhappily, swiveled back on his stool, and picked the chart from the pigeonhole.

"Didn't want to worry you, boy," he explained. "Figured to let you sleep while we were runnin' the pass. Get there about dawn." He nodded toward the cook. "Guess the Chinee heard Herr Stoodt talkin' Honu at the quay when you were below."

The *Tiare* rolled under a big one; the galley lamp swayed, throwing crazy shadows under Harry's bulging blue eyes.

"What's he wanting us to try to put in at Honu for?" he burst out finally. "Tortoise shell ain't worth anything these days."

The Tub threw him a quick look. "Natives have got some copra that wants pickin' up," he answered. He spread out the hand-inked chart. "Keep your shirt on. Look. This new chart shows a new pass. Twice as wide as the old one. This'n is on the windward side of the island."

Harry scanned the chart for a moment, then swung his miserable eyes to the framed photograph swaying on the paneling over the Tub's head. There was deep pleading in his voice. "Tub, tell Stoodt to go to hell this once, will you? For their sakes?" He motioned his head toward the likenesses of the great-eyed Charlotte and the Tub's young son.

The Tub shut his eyes.

"Stoodt doesn't want any copra," Harry pressed. "All he wants is for us to risk the *Tiare* and her cargo again. He picked Honu because it's got the stinkin'est pass to make of any island on the course to Magatea."

The Tub shook his head. "The *toerau* may quiet before we get there. Anyway, we got a new chart to navigate by."

Harry looked at the paper and cried: "It's so faded you can hardly read the soundings."

The Tub's near-sighted eyes squinted. "Must 'a been in the sun."

"The sun ain't shone once since I handed it to you this A. M. folded up with the manifest." Harry sprang to his feet. "You know what? It's supposed to fade. It's a phony!"

"Readin' too many story books again, boy," the Tub said, forcing a smile. "Cool off. Stoodt just traced it in cheap ink, 's all. Anyway I got the bearings memorized."

"Trace hell! He made it up out of his head and put it down in some trick fading chemical." Harry's eyes rolled wildly.

"Turn in!" There was a commanding snap to the Tub's voice.

Harry started to object, took a look at the Tub's snapping eyes, made for the doorway instead.

"We still put in at Honu?" the Chinaman asked pointing above. "Bad *toerau* get worser."

The Tub brushed past Harry.

Fifteen minutes later an exhausted young Harry was tossing in his bunk. The howling northeaster and the strange periodic tinkle and clink in the cargo bothered him. He'd take a snooze and investigate.

HE awoke with a start—to the sound of a thousand teeth grating on planking. There was a piercing squeal of tortured timbers above. A series of rending snaps. A man screamed forward. Glass chinked and jingled. And over the din the congealing growl of that South Sea onus—white reef water.

In the after cabin Harry rolled like a squirrel in a cage. He shot from his bunk to the starboard wall; down to the floor; over to the companionway. Hanging to the door jamb, he blinked dazedly at the washstand crashing its way horizontally over chairs into the bunk; books, shoes, seat chests ricocheted like things gone mad.

With a grinding moan the thrashing world he'd awakened into finally subsided into alarming immobility. What was left of the room's furnishings tumbled at last into a heap of wreckage in one corner and was still. For one horrible moment Harry shut eyes on the shambles lit wanly by the dawnlight from above. A gust of air surged down the companionway carrying with it a strange mixture of land smell and alcohol. White water thundered.

Like a sleepwalker, Harry turned from the after cabin and picked his way forward to the galley. In a litter of shattered crockery sat Ah Ching, his toothless mouth motionlessly agape.

"*Tiare* on reef," his old voice trembled.

Harry nodded dumbly, leaned for a moment on the mess table. The photograph of Charlotte and the little Tub hung insanely askew before him on the port paneling. He passed a hand over his forehead and on a crazy impulse flipped the great eyes and chunky little face to the wall.

The ship's manifest, disengaged from the pigeonhole, now fluttered to the floor. Like a magnet, the cargo evaluation figure drew Harry's wide eyes. Written in Herr Stoodt's blunt hand, the inked figures and words shot out of the gloom: *50,000 francs, captain's responsibility*. The chart of Honu Island's new pass lay white and quite blank alongside. Harry flipped the paper over. Blank on that side, too. So he'd been reading too many story books, eh?

The skylight above him opened suddenly to admit the dripping head and shoulders of the Tub. "Give me a hand at the sweeps in a minute, will you, boy? We're goin' ashore to Honu." His voice was a strange combination of despair and excitement. In one hand he clutched a steel measuring tape. Apparently he'd been overside on the reef examining the hull.

"She stove in anywhere?" asked Harry dully.

The Tub shook his head. "Just hard aground is all. Come on, boy, lower the shoreboat."

"Y'mean . . . we're going to get hands to pry her off?" Harry mumbled.

The Tub's great head shook. "Too heavy."

"Going to get outriggers to float her cargo ashore, then?"

"Cargo'd never reach there," the Tub answered, licking his lips.

"What d'ya mean?" Harry asked; gradually his mind was clearing. "The cases aren't hard to handle."

"Sniff the hatch on your way above." With that the Tub's emotionless face disappeared.

SOMETHING caught at Harry's throat as he set foot on deck. It was a seaman's nightmare. Crazily a-tilt, its lee rail lay half under hungry white water. The anchor forward had burst its lashing and lay, flukes awry, in a maze of uncoiled hawsers. The paint locker over the wheel house gaped, spilling cascades of red lead and black whale oil to the deck below. The planks of the forward hatch cover, tormented by the wracking strain of the grounding, had sprung from their battens, gashing scars in the mizzen boom and mast. Vano,

the mate and the three kanaka deck hands were crouched by the port rail. They were sniffing.

"You the one that yelled?" Harry asked of Vano, trying to smile.

"Not scared no more," the Tahitian grinned, casting a sidelong glance at the open hatch.

Harry's eyes raced over the natives' black heads to the silhouette of Honu Island lying before the dawn a half mile away. A few spirals of early morning smoke from native fires on the far, leeward side of the island swirled up and were caught in the breeze; the *toerau* was dying hard, meaning another blow by nightfall. Harry's eyes turned from the palm-girded island back to Honu's circular barrier reef on which was lodged the *Tiare*. Harry followed it first northward, then to the south. It was unending, an impassable barrier.

He heard the Tub's wet canvas shoes squashing up behind him.

"This where the chart said the pass was?" he asked the fat man quietly.

The Tub nodded, made a faint motion to throw an arm over spindly shoulders, decided on a cigarette instead. He twisted the cigarette into his bamboo holder. "Didn't find out there wasn't any pass till it was too late to heave to in the *toerau*." He shrugged his great shoulders. "Still might have pulled her out of it with the auxiliary if my peepers weren't so near-sighted." His eyes wandered to the open hatch.

Harry's mouth hardened. "Stoodt's phony chart is all faded this morning."

Tiny lines appeared around the Tub's tired eyes. "Just like in a story book, eh boy?"

"I'm going to save that chart paper for evidence anyway."

"Don't be stupid." The Tub started toward the hatch. "Stoodt's story, an' it'll hold in any court of law, will be that I discovered what the cargo was and got plastered. Nobody but a guy fresh off the wagon would pile up on the wrong side of an island. Take a smell."

Harry leaned over the open hatch cover. The rows of cases below had burst their battens. A few cases had cracked open; in these glittered bottles, some unbroken, some dripping brown liquid from their shattered sides. The fumes staggered Harry.

"Liquor," he gasped.

"Rum," said the Tub. "Forward hatch is full, too. Vano and the crew're already takin' a bath in it."

One look at the natives flat on their backs hilariously tackling the liquor with animal abandon sent Harry aft again. He glanced worriedly toward shore. "We'll get ganged for some of this," he said, "if those kanakas ashore find out what's in the hatch."

" 'Swhy we can't ferry it," the Tub said. "Figured it might be more sociable to give it away than have it took. Come on, boy, we're slingin' a party. To make Stoodt's story really stand on its feet!"

"We're what?" asked Harry aghast.

"Receiving the folks of Honu Island—with rum."

Harry's jaw stuck out. "Like hell we are. They'll drink it all if they come aboard. This is a partnership, remember. Half the grog's mine. I'll fight every goddam kanaka that tries to get aboard," he went on, his eyes blazing. "No sir, you don't throw away my share on a wholesale drunk—"

"I said"—the Tub's jaw muscles stood out under their beef—"we're throwin' a party. Us." He towered over the young man.

Rage seized Harry. "Ya cheap souse," he lashed out. "Just because things go wrong you turn yellow and slide off the wagon. You throw away the cargo—*my* cargo—you throw away my sis—your own kid—for a goddam brawl!"

The Tub shuddered, took a step forward—silent.

In the breathless quiet that followed, Harry felt his wrath drain suddenly into a hopeless despair. He closed his eyes, got limply to his feet, made his way for the shoreboat. "O.K., skipper," he mumbled.

The Tub smiled. "Be right with you," he said huskily. "Gotta see Ah Ching for a second."

HARRY wondered what had happened to himself as ten minutes later he pulled at the skiff's sweeps. How could a guy like the Tub put up such a strong

front against the threat of a crack-up for three long years, and then go so completely jelly-fish inside when it came to a head. You'd think he didn't know there was a nearly-paid-for schooner rocking back there on the reef, due to break up before another sunrise, 50,000 francs worth of cargo it would take them ten years to pay for. You'd think he didn't give a hang for all the Charlottes and little Tubs in the world.

Maybe he didn't.

Harry sagged on his oar.

"Have some rum, boy," the Tub suggested, resting on his sweep. He retrieved a bottle from under the thwart, handed it to Harry.

"Why not?" Harry coughed, wiped his lips, offered the bottle back to the fat man.

"Not right now," said the Tub. Something had engaged his attention around the shoulder of the circular shore. His wide mouth curled now in a thoughtful smile. "Look." He pointed. "What Ah Ching was tellin' about."

Rounding the lagoon, their brown skins glistening wetly against the blue green of the lagoon were three natives—two men and a girl—sledding curiously under and over the water's surface atop moving knolls of brown shell. Their laughter carried boisterously in the quiet morning air.

"What're they doing?" asked Harry indifferently.

"Racin' turtles."

With the finesse of aviators who direct their craft up or down by regulating the tilt of the horizontal aft surfaces, the brown folk dived or emerged by tilting the level of the big tortoises' shells. Banking to the right or left meant simply transferring one's weight from the middle of the shell. Polynesian-like, the contestants tried for as much splash as speed.

"Figured we might stage a little tortoise race to the *Tiare* this P.M.," the Tub muttered, picking up his sweep. "Soon as we hit Honu, goin' to talk to the chief."

"Why'n't you just give them the liquor and get it over with?" Harry suggested sourly. He was looking across the water back to the *Tiare*. With every surf her masts shuddered. "If she was empty, bet she'd come near floating," he murmured.

"Lot of difference between comin' near 'n comin' clear," sighed the Tub, laying to his sweep. Harry thought of the fat man's measuring tape he'd been using earlier in the morning and shrugged.

"How long . . . do you give her on the reef?" he asked between strokes.

The Tub's eyes rolled to the swaying coconut palms ashore. "Can't tell. Depends on how much surf the *toerau* kicks into her planking tonight."

Fifteen minutes later Harry was resting grumpily athwart the beached shoreboat. Reproachfully, he watched his brother-in-law's bulk plod up the beach toward the clump of *niau*-thatched houses that was Honu Village.

THE shoreboat was back alongside the *Tiare* by noon. A gibbering Ah Ching, a dish towel around his head, another wrapping his skinny mid-riff, hung over the port rail. A butcher knife glistened in one yellow hand.

"Kanakas come here on tortoises?" he asked the Tub.

"Five gangs of about a hundred each. Quarter of an hour apart. Can y' handle 'em?"

The Chinee nodded his topside dish-towel and grinned.

"Got lines noosed?" asked the Tub.

"All ready."

"What's the gag?" Harry put in contemptuously.

"Ah Ching's got his mind set on turtle stew."

"Bilge water!" snorted Harry.

"Yessir. Come on, boy . . . we hoists your stock out of the hatches. You're playin' bartender at this party."

Sullenly Harry glanced across the half mile of lagoon to Honu's shore. Like ants jostling aphis, his customers were already rounding up their racing mounts. He mumbled, "I thought you couldn't catch turtles except after dark."

"For fun and rum," the Tub answered from the hatch, "kanakas work miracles."

Two hours later those aboard the doomed *Tiare* were ready to receive. Certainly the hosts of no party in French

Oceania have before or since looked forward to entertaining with more divergent emotions. The *Tiare's* bartender, pasty-faced, swallowing more and more rum against the tears that wanted to flow, sat dejectedly with a hammer before the rum cases piled high and wide on the after deck. One of the hatch plankings set on two boxes was to serve as a barrier-bar against the five waves of oncoming Honu islanders. On this Harry now buried his head in his arms.

Forward and below the *Tiare's* bow, joyfully sloshing around on the reef like some monstrous amphibian, was the Tub. No man, about to roll off the beer wagon, could have appeared more exhilarated over the occasion. His great clown mouth was stretched in a smile. His near-sighted eyes glittered like brown diamonds in the midday sun.

"They comin' yet?" he bawled up to the yellow Ah Ching who, like some fantastic Oriental figurehead, straddled the *Tiare's* bowsprit overhead, a butcher knife in each hand.

"By 'm by," the Chinese answered, peering across the lagoon. He glanced below at the Tub on the reef. "Don't lose lines," he called down.

The fat man shifted a score of ten-foot nooses that hung over one shoulder.

Aft, aboard, Harry rolled out a demijohn of rum, the prize for the Honu islander with the fastest tortoise. The rest of the gang would receive two litres apiece. "Give 'em all we've got," the Tub had ordered.

"Here they come!" Ah Ching's frenzied voice now squeaked from the bowsprit.

"Drink 'er up . . . up . . . up!" bellowed the Tub's voice from below on the reef. Then he laughed; and it sounded like the boom of a drum over the surf's hiss.

Didn't he care? Didn't he give a damn? Harry whispered miserably to himself. *Oh, Charlotte . . .*

Now there sounded faint shouting from the lagoon. It grew, resolving into an uproar of squeals, screams, whoops of laughter. Water churned. Harry took a peek over the stacked cases, sat down, took another drink.

The lagoon off the *Tiare's* prow was crawling with the bodies of a hundred-odd brown girls and men; with turtle shells . . . turtle heads . . . turtle flippers. The natives in the vanguard had slipped from their mounts' shells and were adding the propulsion of their own legs to that of the tortoises' frantic flippers. Those in the rear, still atop their shells, banked, dived, emerged for the sheer fun of it. Old and young, they yelled their approval of the white men's party.

Harry shuddered as he saw the glistening brown arm of the winner of the first race slither over the port rail. There followed a muscular shoulder; a shock of curly black hair; a brown face, its white teeth open in a yowl of delight. With a cat-like spring, the native wrapped himself around the demi-john of rum.

Then the deluge. Over the prow, the stern, amidships squirmed the scores of others. Like bees to the hive they swarmed toward Harry and his bar. Their red, green and blue *pareus* streaming water, necks garlanded with drenched frangipani leis, bodies reeking with pungent coatings of coconut oil. There was a pop of corks under the persuasion of strong white teeth. Gurgles over the sound of Harry's unwilling hammer prying case lids loose. The panting of Polynesian lungs. Howls of rapture as the first fiery gulping took hold inside of writhing brown stomachs. Joyous stomping of bare feet—enough to make the groaning *Tiare* teeter in her tracks. A fragrant tiare blossom found its way over Harry's dodging ear. A creamy-brown Diana brushed his cheeks with her lips. There were affectionate slaps on his weary back. Full bottles over the bar . . . empties over the ship's side . . . bottles . . . bottles . . .

Up from the reef forward, swelling the bedlam, sounded the Tub's bellow: "Drink 'er up boys and girls . . . drink 'er up . . . up . . . "

Whack—whack went Ah Ching's unseen knife. Soon the fishy odor of turtle flesh swirled aft to greet the fumes of rum . . . the stench of the paint locker's spilled whale oil . . . the heady sweetness of island flowers crushed beneath naked toes. Who, Harry wondered hazily, would eat all the turtles silly Ah Ching was butchering. Harry took another drink.

THE following two hours were never to be clear to the *Tiare's* barman that day. One wave after another of screaming Honu islanders broke over the boat's sides. There would be a phalanx of outstretched brown hands. More teeth on yielding corks. More gurgles. Finally streams of natives clambering over the ship's sides to the reef below to make room for the newly arrived hordes. As the last wave of Honuans broke over the *Tiare's* side a trail of islanders was already swimming its way across the la-

***Streaming water, necks garlanded with leis, they swarmed over the* Tiare.**

goon toward the nearby shore . . . bottle in one hand . . . the other paddling . . . mouths wide open in happy laughter.

Harry remembered a foul-smelling Tub leaving his place on the reef below to climb aboard the shuddering *Tiare*. The fat man's hands, sticky with turtle flesh, slapped Harry's shoulders. "It's two o'clock . . . high tide!" the Tub shouted. Out of hazy eyes, Harry watched the fat man throw empty cases and bottles overboard, shoo the last of the Honu islanders from the heaving *Tiare's* deck.

Harry made an unsteady gesture toward the after deck where the rum had been. "'S all gone," he rasped bitterly. "Hope you're satisfied. It'll only take us ten years to pay for it."

"Turn in, boy," the Tub said. His dripping bulk wheeled aft toward the auxiliary engine.

Was this what getting drunk did, Harry wondered, making his way toward the after cabin. Make the deck bounce under you like a thing afloat? He sank into his bunk, wondering why the Tub had started the motor.

HE awoke six hours later to the darkness of a rolling after cabin. He sat up, rubbed his eyes, staggered toward the companionway. Sea—deep, gentle, safe, black sea—stretched comfortingly to a far, moon-etched horizon, where danced a tiny dot of land.

He raced into the galley. Visored cap a-tilt, huge shoulders comfortably hunched over his magazine and a bottle of beer, sat the Tub. At the moment his near-sighted brown eyes were fixed on the photograph of Charlotte and her son on the wall.

"What h-happened?" stuttered Harry.

"Better stay sober next time, boy," grinned the Tub. Then he added, "No, I wanted you full. Was afraid it might not work . . . "

"What wouldn't?"

"Swappin' a cargo of rum for lightweight tortoise shell and floatin' the *Tiare* off the reef."

Harry murmured incredulously, "The kanakas drank her off?"

The Tub nodded. "Ah Ching butchered over four hundred turtles—those the natives rode out on. Shells are in the hold."

"But shell ain't worth anything," Harry objected.

"Aren't," corrected the Tub. Then added, "Are." He shoved a cable beside the open magazine. That cable quoted a tortoise shell price that staggered Harry; the magazine article predicted the tortoise shell spectacle fad that was to sweep the States in 1922. "Remember the new specs on Ed at Lovaina's yesterday?" the Tub asked. Harry nodded.

"With this cargo, Favors & McNiel," the fat man went on, "can pay Herr Stoodt for his rum, clean up what's owin' on the *Tiare*, 'n . . . still have enough left over to bring a couple of folks home we're itchin' to see."

Harry swallowed, looked out the porthole to the dot that was Honu, and murmured, "Favors & McNiel." He turned back to the Tub. "If we ever get heeled, Tub, let's . . . "

"Get some shell specs," supplied the Tub, "'n pay back the favor our Honu friends did us, eh?" His eyes wandered to the porthole. "Say twenty years from now . . . you'n me n' Charlotte'll drop 'em off some . . . champagne. Better for 'em than rum."

THE CAMP-FIRE

Where readers, writers and adventurers meet

BARRÉ LYNDON, whose "Sword of Qualoon" carves its first slice of three out of the Middle East this month, hasn't been with us since Feb. 15, '30 when his short story of submarine warfare, "Silt," appeared. To re-introduce himself and post us on the intervening years he writes—

I was born in London, and served all through the first world war with an infantry regiment . . . on the Somme, at Bullecourt, Cambrai, Ypres and places like that. I'd begun writing before the war, and continued afterwards . . . the entire object then being to get money to get around and see automobile races. I've written some books about that, and I've been around most of the road-racing circuits in Europe. (Old-time *Adventure* readers may recall "Carriage Paid to Hell," an auto-racing story of Mr. Lyndon's published in these pages back in Aug. '29. *Ed.*)

I spent a good deal of time in Africa, one way and another.

I made one trip out of Kenya up to the southern border of Abyssinia, using a Ford rigged as a safari car—a sort of station wagon arrangement—and driving over camel tracks. I had a native from the Comoro Islands with me; he couldn't read or write, but he could speak English, Arabic, Swahili, French, Italian and Somali, and he could also drive and service the machine, all of which seemed amazing to me. I went up to see some fellows at an outpost; they were right on the Abyssinian border, with nobody else nearer than about three hundred miles. There were three men at the post, and we used to go down to the River Dawa, on the border, and try to hit crocodiles with my .32 automatic pistol. It was the only weapon I had, but pretty useful; I never had any trouble anyway because, although the Somali natives up there are a bit treacherous, the very sight of a gun scares them off.

Around this time I had become interested in the theater, and I wrote several plays which went very well. One of them, "The Amazing Dr. Clitterhouse," was done on Broadway, and I understand that Paramount is getting ready to shoot the film of another, "The Man in Half Moon Street." And there was "Sundown," the film which Walter Wanger made. Incidentally, I believe I've written the world's only motor-racing play . . . anyway, the only one to have been done in

the West End of London. That was put on at the Phoenix Theater, in Charing Cross Road; it didn't make much money but it was a lot of fun and very noisy.

There is something peculiarly fascinating about Port Said, where I have set "The Sword of Qualoon." In a way, it isn't much of a town and most people simply pass through enroute to somewhere else; but it holds representatives of almost every race in the world and you have only to scratch a little to find very extraordinary things. The place has been cleaned up a goodish bit now, but it had the reputation of being the wickedest town on earth and it is still pretty tough.

The time of the story is right now, when Port Said is a kind of hinge for operations in the Middle East. I have been there several times, and was at Port Sudan for a while, and went down to Suakin from there. Suakin is just as it's shown in the story, and is quite astonishing—only of course I've 'fictionized' it a bit where the Yezidees are concerned. Incidentally, you hear about them all through the Middle East.

Here's hoping it won't be another twelve years between this story and the next!

DE WITT NEWBURY appends the following note on his story in this issue—

Herlaug and Rollaug were real people about 1200 years ago. The old historical saga tells about them. How they built their grave-mound, and how Herlaug had himself buried alive in it sooner than knuckle under to King Harald Fairhair, the early blitz-krieger.

The rest of the story is fiction, suggested by various old accounts of tomb-robbing. Lots of them in the sagas. All with a flavor of the supernatural, of course, but probably true in spite of that. For instance, there is the one about Hroar, son of the Jarl of Gautland, who dug into the "howe" of Soti the Viking. He had two friends with him, and they both "died suddenly from the stench and hot wind that blew out." But Hroar waited for the air to clear, then went in. He saw Soti in there, sitting up as large as life. The old Viking was laying for intruders—a pretty lively corpse—and they had a terrible battle. Hroar managed to drag Soti over to the entrance, in the ruckus; and when the light hit him he "fell to the ground, powerless." Nothing but a corpse again. Then Hroar took his helm, sword, and a gold ring from his arm, and walked out. He had a good story and the loot to prove it.

Wishing you the same and many of 'em—

FOUR brand-new recruits to the ranks of our Writers' Brigade this month. Bill Gulick, the author of "You Gotta Be Hard," says—

Biographically, I'm twenty-five and single, but still have an open mind on the latter.

Went to University of Oklahoma for a couple of years, mostly to play ball.

Started my professional literary career by writing themes for freshman at fifty cents per. —Once won a medal for poetry— (print that in small type)—*Just as you say, Bill. Ed*—but have since reformed to writing of westerns and highline yarns.

When the big league scouts overlooked me through some oversight, I got a job as timekeeper with an electrical construction crew. It was white collar work, they told me, but I soon discovered creosote and mud and grease didn't look too well on a white shirt so I donned khaki like the rest of the boys. The foreman of the first crew with which I worked had the idea that a timekeeper should learn the construction business from below-ground up, so a digging shovel was stuck in my hands and I started ground-rooting. We were stringing in a new line through the South Canadian river bottom and to save the expense of hiring a team of mules, four men, including myself, pulled the wire through more miles of hot, mosquito infested swamps than you'd think existed in a state as dry as Oklahoma is supposed to be. Now a mile of No. 6 bare copper weighs something over 400 pounds and what with it dragging across trees and mud and the boys back on the wire truck laying the brake reel tight just for the hell of it, I guess the four of us could outpull the same number of the best mules in the state.

We never stayed in the same place long enough for it to get monotonous. We'd be two or three weeks building a few miles of rural line, then orders would come to move a hundred miles or so to do a little sub-station work. Then it'd be a month on a sixty-six thousand volt cross country line, a hurry-up extension to an oil field sub-station, or maybe a salvage job tearing

down a line the material of which was needed on another job.

There's something about construction work, particularly highline work, that gets in your blood, they say. And I wasn't immune. I forgot about going back to school, stayed with the highline crew for over two years. Became dignified by the title of Field Clerk after a while, which meant simply that I had done my apprenticeship of hole digging, truck driving, swamping, wire stringing, etc., and was now a full fledged flunky. Later, work began to peter out. I stood all the cuts in personnel but the last one. Found it hard to settle down to anything after being on the go, so turned to writing, figuring if I couldn't work on a highline crew I could write about it. Am doing that full time now, scribbling on a highline book between shorts.

Ambition: yesterday, it was to be invited to sit in at the *Camp-Fire;* today, to be invited back.

"Cimarron Crossing," another highline yarn from the same typewriter, is due to appear shortly. Better dig up a third ambition, Bill!

AND Samuel W. Taylor, who makes his initial appearance on our contents page this month with "Golden Showdown," says—

There was a little group of us back at school, and one of the group, Glenn S. Potter, had published a poem in *ADVENTURE.* Ah, yes, I remember the hopeless envy, though Potter is now dead and of the group I'm the only one who has stuck to writing.

Potter, by the way, was one of the last westerners, in the old sense of the word. He could write, and he could paint, and his short life was dedicated to finding and preserving the remnants of the old west. He owned a dry-farm in Bancroft, Idaho, and during a stay with him I rode the Grizzly Creek roundup, an experience I'll never forget.

The last time I saw Potter, just a few years later, he was living in a city apartment, but without surrender. His pictures still had the feel of space, and in an attic room he'd contrived a massive hobby horse for his baby. The hobby horse stood chest high to a man, and its body was a log big enough to fit his old Hamley saddle. When bedtime came, Potter climbed into the saddle with his baby in his arms, and got the massive thing into motion. The thump and roar of the rockers was like the sound of a herd of mustangs high-tailing over a ridge, and there was Potter's voice roaring songs of the range as he sung his baby to sleep. This was the last time I saw Potter, and I like to remember him that way.

I'm sorry to go on like this, but "Golden Showdown" is a story of the old and the new, and Potter somehow stands on the ridge between the two.

Regarding personal biographical stuff, I have ridden an actual round-up, but that doesn't make me a cowboy. I also spent three years as a youngster on the Utah-Nevada desert, sixty-four miles from the railroad, where conditions of the old west were as alive as they could be found in these times. This still doesn't make me a cowboy, even though the kids all fancied themselves very tough and a boy was practically naked without boots, muffler, swinging vest, sombrero and leather cuffs like the men. Chaps of course were part of the costume when riding, and on the round-up the men wore six-guns, not low where they'd get pulled off by the brush, but high on the hip. . . . This country, by the way, saw what was perhaps the last Indian uprising, in 1917. The white men had been called to war, and the wily Redskins got the idea that now was the time to get back their ancient heritage. So there were signal fires on the mountains, and the people of the valley gathered at the store and poked some chinking from between the logs for loopholes, and stood guard with ready rifle for attack. I've thought for some time that this would make a good story or article, and I'm going to get around to it one of these days.

We think you may have something there, Sam, and hereby put in our bid for first look, if, as and when!

WARD TANZER, recruit No. 3, was a bit hard to round up and corral for Camp-Fire. And his story—even after it was bought, had a habit of slipping its halter and straying. And thereby hangs a tale. "The Tub and the Tortoise" arrived in this office almost exactly a year ago, with a letter of enclosure from the literary agent who was submitting it for the author. To wit—

Here is a story from a young advertising man from San Francisco who, last year, went down to Tahiti to spend a year in intensive writing.

In a letter concerning the background of the story the author says: "It is based remotely on an incident which occurred in the Dangerous Archipelago many years ago. The turtle racing (I have this first-hand from a gent from Scilly Island) is authentic; so is the 'toerau' wind (it almost carried my house away night before last).

The San Francisco *Chronicle* has recently published a series of articles by Mr. Tanzer concerning the reverberations in Tahiti of the changes in the Homeland caused by the War.

I shall be greatly interested in your reaction . . . etc.

Our reaction left nothing to be desired, we hope, for we promptly wrote back that we thought the story was swell—all but page 22 of the manuscript which unaccountably was missing—and that if we could have a look at that page and it measured up to the rest of the yarn we'd be glad to forward our check. To make a long story short—missing page arrived finally, it measured up nicely, we sent check. That should have been that, with the next step publication, but woe was us! In the meantime we had given the ms. to Artist Hazelton to read and illustrate. In the throes of moving his studio from New York to his home in New Jersey he managed to make the drawing between vanloads, but also in the shuffle to lose half a dozen pages of the ms. out of the middle of the story, including the one that had been missing in the first place. Next step in the saga of unfortunate events was the fact that there was no longer any steamship service to Tahiti, where the author still was marooned, December 7th having rolled by and the entire South Pacific area in turmoil. So it began to look like the story would never see print. Fortunately the literary agent on the West Coast was able to resurrect the original copy from which the typist had made the transcript we now had portions of, plus illustrations. We had asked Mr. Tanzer's agent for some biographical material for this department but all we could learn was that he was a graduate of Stanford University, had worked his way to Europe on a cattle boat, toured the Continent in a second-hand Fiat, written advertising copy and gone to Tahiti to try his hand at fiction. This was his first sale.

Donald Barr Chidsey now enters the scene. He had come back from Tahiti on what was just about the last boat and we asked him if he knew Tanzer. Pick it up, Don—

"Sure I know him. It's a small island, in the first place, and there never were very many white men there, and there are fewer than ever now. A swell guy. I don't know much about his background, though. Comes from California. We don't have much social life in Tahiti, but Ward gets around. Everybody knows and likes him. He's got a natural manner with the natives—gets along beautifully with them. He lives in a little bamboo and *niau* (coconut thatch) hut out in Taunoa, near Papeete, almost across the way from the house where Frank Stimson, first cousin to the Secretary of War, lives. Frank's been down there for twenty-odd years and he's supposed to be the greatest living authority on Polynesian dialects. He's also supposed to be the best bridge player in French Oceania, but *I* only rate him the second best. I'll admit he's still a little bit ahead of me, in the five years we've been playing together. But only a matter of about 20 francs. But wait till I get back!

All of which was interesting but more Stimson than Tanzer. It began to look like we'd never get a line on the guy. Then, May 30, came the following direct from the author, from California—

Sent material for *Camp-Fire* from Tahiti back in November. Maybe the Japs intercepted. Here goes for a rerun:

War has come closer to Tahiti since "The Tub" and "Harry" threw their champagne reunion for the Honu natives under the atoll's coconut trees. Today non-French nationals are restricted to the island of Tahiti only. Papeete town has been blacked out since September 17, 1941. Automobile travel in and out of the city limits has also been restricted for some time. Boat arrivals from Aus-

tralia and the States are infrequent, sometimes marked by as long as four month intervals. The island has three meatless days a week; no butter, onions, shortening, oils; very few canned vegetables, utensils, cloth goods; no scotch, gin or other imported liquors. You roll your own cigarettes of fiery native tobacco and wrapping paper—or Waldorf if you've any left.

All this would be pretty grim in any place other than Tahiti, I imagine. Here one borrows on the mood of the natives, shrugs and goes fishing; or off to a cockfight; or to a bush party built around a kerosene tin full of potent fermented mango brew.

Life in the outlying Paumotu and Leeward Islands is slipping also into more natural ways. Though copra revenue is high (francs 1.70 per kilo) as is vanilla (francs 375 dried) nobody can buy much in the way of manufactured gadgets. Meals revolve almost entirely around foods peculiar to the locality—fish, *pota* (taro leaves in coconut creme), octopus, *tarua* root, bananas, now and then pork or chicken. Tinned beef—South Sea staple—still finds its way around the Low and Leeward Islands when an Aussie boat comes in.

Outside of food and finery shortages, the islands have few reminders of war. Papeete, with its radios and vocal white colony, provides exception; as does the standing Tahiti Free France army which is faintly mechanized, but very determined to resist invasion. These lads' maneuvers sometimes break the districts' stillness, but for the most part weeks on end roll by without word of battle. We hope the 1,400 miles separating Tahiti from the sizzling Sydney-San Francisco shipping lane will allow this peace to endure.

Hopped a boat touching Tahiti last month, find myself now safe and sound at home and up to my neck in Naval applications, questionnaires and the like. Where from here I don't know. Nor when. Since I'm unmarried and sound enough of wind and limb, I imagine Uncle Sam will be booking my passages from the States the next year or so. Hope they include Tokyo.

Well, that's Tanzer, safe and sound and back home again. And the "Tub" with no pages missing. We've got our fingers crossed, however, till the magazine gets on the stands. Anything can happen these days!

CHARLES J. DUTTON, the fourth addition to our ranks this month, says—

I'd rather talk more about Dobbins than myself but briefly:

Twenty years a Unitarian minister. Written, published (I think it's twenty books) sixteen mystery stories, the others serious. Also a good many articles, in magazines.

Wrote the "Samaritans of Molokai," story of Father Damien, and Brother Joseph, and had for some months the forty-eight years' accumulation of letters, etc. of the famous lay brother, in my possession. Incidently that book was the choice of the Catholic Book of the Month Club. "Oliver Hazard Perry," when published, was the first biography of Perry in 84 years. Lately published "Saints and Sinners," an autobiography.

Leaving the ministry, I became senior agent, for District 6—six thousand miles of northwest Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania Department of Justice. Resigned to become State Historian of the same state.

For the last two years have lived in Massachusetts, and my present worry, is how can a writer, aged fifty-two get into some branch of the service?

Best of luck, Mr. Dutton, and we hope you find the service you want, to add a new chapter to a distinguished career!

FOR us the most heart-stirring incident that has come out of this war to date was the glorious chapter from the story of the defense of Corregidor which told of the raising of the Stars and Stripes to the top of its flag pole after it had been shot away on two occasions—April 19 and May 3—within a fortnight. Mr. Wittmack's gripping and dignified delineation of the action appears on our cover this month. We hope you get the same thrill from it as we do. The cover is dedicated to the men who risked their lives on those two occasions to keep the Flag flying: Captain Arthur E. Huff, of St. Louis; Corporal Louis A. Roark, of Gypsum, Kan.; Private First Class Roy O. Bailey, of Kansas City, Mo.; Private Harley H. Leaird, of Durant, Okla., the first time—and Captain Brewster G. Gallup, Technical Sergeant Ezra R. Smith and Honorio Punongbayen, a Filipino soldier, the second.—K. S. W.

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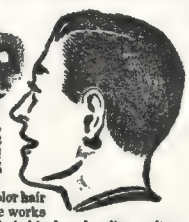

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(Continued from page 103)

"He's coming along all right," the doctor said. "We had to pry him out of your hand. I'm asking how are you feeling?"

Tolan was feeling well enough to feel an active man's impatience at being sick.

"What d'you mean I can't be hurt? My arm here hammers like a stamp mill and, look, it's all swelled up like a drowned shoat."

"Just a bad infection from the swamp." The doctor was quite callously cheerful about it. "But your constitution will shake that off. I never saw a man so close to dead come back so well in twenty-four hours. In fact, you are so well that I'll let you sit up. The general will be coming to see you."

"The general?"

"Himself. This Mr. Grant of yours is quite a big-shot. He has been talking."

Tolan only grunted. His eyes narrowed down to consider his situation from all its complicated angles.

The general came and he was as genial as a general can be without bursting buttons. He said: "Well, young man? Well, well! It seems we—that is, our country, owes you quite some congratulations on a heroic feat, as Mr. Grant tells it."

Long Tolan stood up, long and lean and wooden-faced. He saluted as awkwardly as any recruit of but a few days training might. He said: "Reporting in, sir. Private Tolan Hatfield, deserter from Nineteenth Infantry, Second Battalion, six years back."

The general's geniality was shocked from him by the horrid word.

"Deserter, eh? Hum-mh. Mr. Grant said nothing about that."

"I reckoned a man with his guts wouldn't." Tolan still didn't know how to talk to a general. "But god damn, if a city feller can stick by his job an' be ready to take his medicine seein' it through, I'll bet I can."

"Um-mm," said the general. His geniality began to recover from the shock. "Um-mm! A.W.O.L. for six years is a long time. We'll have to see what we can do about it."

The Trail Ahead

. . . to the terraced rice fields of the Ifugaos in war-torn Luzon, where Jap bombers rain death on MacArthur's gallant handful of heroes . . . E. Hoffmann Price takes you there in a stirring novelette—"Gold Standard"—

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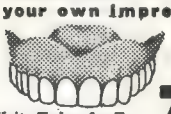

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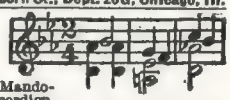

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Would like information concerning Peter John Fifer who resided last Jan. 1941 at 13 Spring Street, Boston, Mass. I have some souvenirs of his that he left in my care six years ago and would be glad to return them to him. M. Dolliman, 1459 W. 101 St., Los Angeles, Cal.

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William Foster Elliot, George Herzog, Justin Knox Miller and William R. Kaake, friends of my long past youth, please let me hear from you. Walt Woestman, 2310 Midlothian Drive, Altadena, California.

Would like to hear from members of the Northern Pacific Ry. civil engineer group with whom I served at Trout Creek, Montana, under A. C. Terril, during year 1908. Among them, Leigh Adkins, Henry Aldrich, Carl Bohland. Communicate with D. C. Corle, 600 Ninth Ave., Mount Dora, Fla.

Would like to hear from Eddie Conlon, who was in the infantry in Panama in 1939 and came back early in 1940. L. E. Hilliard, 45 Summer St., Manchester, Mass.

Edward R. Wilson, about 60, civil engineer, mining expert, ex-Ordnance officer. Last heard of, Prineville, Ore., spring of 1940. Word will be appreciated by Jack Horsfoll, Rock Creek Blvd., Nashville, Ore.

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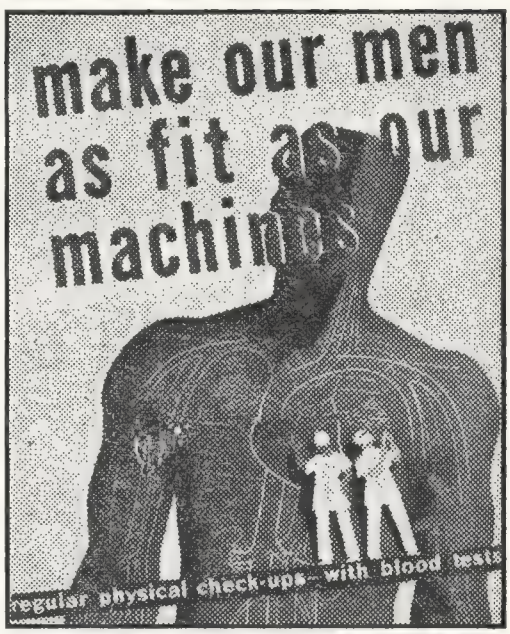

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Madagascar—RALPH LINTON, Dept. of Anthropology, Columbia University, New York City.

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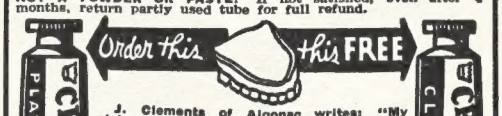

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- ☐ Coal Mining
- ☐ Concrete Engineering
- ☐ Contracting and Building
- ☐ Cotton Manufacturing
- ☐ Diesel Engines
- ☐ Electrical Drafting
- ☐ Electrical Engineering
- ☐ Electric Lighting
- ☐ Foundryman ☐ Heating
- ☐ Heat Treatment of Metals
- ☐ Highway Engineering
- ☐ House Planning
- ☐ Industrial Metallurgy
- ☐ Locomotive Engineer
- ☐ Machinist
- ☐ Management of Inventions
- ☐ Marine Engines
- ☐ Mechanical Drafting
- ☐ Mechanical Engineering
- ☐ Mine Foreman
- ☐ Navigation
- ☐ Patternmaking ☐ Plumbing
- ☐ Practical Telephony
- ☐ Public Works Engineering
- ☐ Pulp and Paper Making
- ☐ Radio, General
- ☐ Radio Operating
- ☐ Radio Servicing
- ☐ R. R. Section Foreman
- ☐ R. R. Signalman ☐ Refrigeration
- ☐ Sanitary Engineering
- ☐ Sheet Metal Work
- ☐ Ship Drafting
- ☐ Shipfitting ☐ Shop Practice
- ☐ Steam Electric ☐ Steam Engines
- ☐ Steam Fitting
- ☐ Structural Drafting
- ☐ Structural Engineering
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping
- ☐ Telegraph Engineering
- ☐ Telephone Work
- ☐ Textile Designing
- ☐ Toolmaking ☐ Welding
- ☐ Woolen Manufacturing

BUSINESS COURSES

- ☐ Accounting ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Bookkeeping
- ☐ Business Correspondence
- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Cartooning ☐ Civil Service
- ☐ College Preparatory
- ☐ Commercial
- ☐ Commercial Illustrating
- ☐ Cost Accounting
- ☐ C. P. Accounting
- ☐ First Year College
- ☐ Foremanship ☐ French
- ☐ Good English
- ☐ High School
- ☐ Managing Men at Work
- ☐ Railway Postal Clerk
- ☐ Salesmanship
- ☐ Secretarial ☐ Spanish
- ☐ Showcard and Sign Lettering
- ☐ Traffic Management

HOME ECONOMICS COURSES

- ☐ Advanced Dressmaking
- ☐ Foods and Cookery
- ☐ Home Dressmaking
- ☐ Professional Dressmaking and Designing
- ☐ Tea Room and Cafeteria Management, Catering

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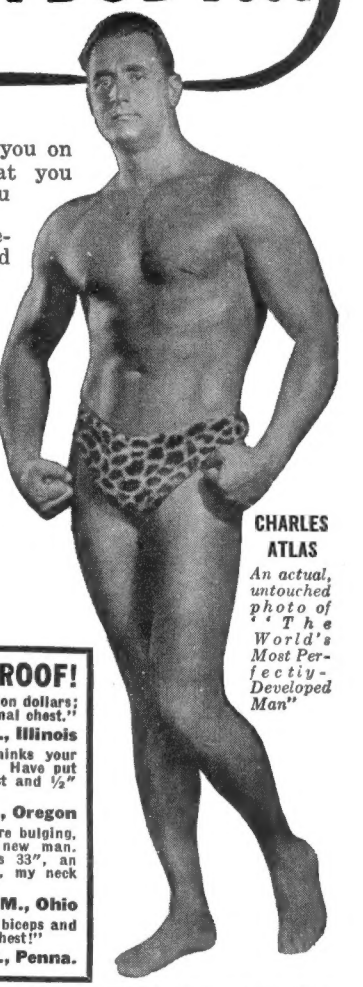
That's what I said—*15 minutes a day!* That's all I need to PROVE—regardless of how old or young you are, or how ashamed you may be of your present physique—that I can give you a body men envy and women admire. Biceps that can dish it out, and a muscle-ridged stomach that can take it. A full, deep barrel-chest. Legs that never tire. A tough, sinewy back. An all-around physique that can laugh at ANY kind of rough going.

We're ALL in the Army today! The heavy war-time demands on strength and endurance are no longer limited to front-line trenches. It's only a matter of time until EVERY citizen is called to shoulder his full share of the load. ALREADY the Army has enrolled men from 18 to 64. And whether you do your part in Uncle Sam's Services or as a home-front civilian, you've GOT to be in 100% SHAPE. Every man, young or old, owes it to himself to get a body with the bulldog staying power that double shifts of working call for. HOW DO *YOU* STACK UP?



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